

## **Teacher Tool 251: The Cassius Project— Social Studies and United States History Activity Ideas**

This teacher tool provides activity ideas in the areas of Social Studies and United States History that are related to videos in the “Cassius Project” series of videos available on the Educate.Today website. The “Cassius Project” is an initiative created by Metro Theater Company surrounding its 2016 production of “And In This Corner...Cassius Clay.” Educate.Today is proud and honored to be a collaborative partner in this endeavor through the production of a series of videos and related educational materials. Originally developed to “offer a series of community programs, wrap-around tools and resources related to the production to educate audiences and then engage and empower them to find ways to get personally involved in making St. Louis a stronger community,” these videos and materials are designed to take the project to an even wider audience of students, educators, theater lovers, and community change agents across the country.

Through the story of young Cassius Clay growing up in Louisville, Kentucky, playwright Idris Goodwin explores powerful and compelling issues and themes and invites us to participate in important conversations about bullying, identity, racism, community, and the capacity for empowerment and difference making in all of us. Videos and educational materials in the project are designed for students and teachers in grades 5 through 12 to be used for cross-curricular exploration and building wide conversation as well as within the specific curriculum areas of Language Arts, Theater/Drama, Social Studies/History, and Character Education.

### **Video resources in this series are:**

Theater 41: Meet the Playwright—A Conversation with Idris Goodwin  
<https://educate.today/videos/4514>

Theater 42: Meet the Players—A Conversation with the Director and Actors of Metro Theater Company’s Production of “And In This Corner...Cassius Clay”  
<https://educate.today/videos/4516>

Theater 43: Scene 1—Cassius Meets Officer Joe Martin  
<https://educate.today/videos/4519>

Theater 44: Scene 2—Learning the News of Emmett Till’s Death  
<https://educate.today/videos/4522>

Theater 45: Scene 3—Eddie and Cassius Go to a Whites Only Diner  
<https://educate.today/videos/4524>

Theater 46: On Boxing and Fight Choreography  
<https://educate.today/videos/4526>

**Activity Ideas related to Social Studies and United States History  
begin on the next page of this document**

### **Activity Idea 1: Understanding History Through Different Mediums**

This activity can be done by individual students, students in small groups, or an entire class.

**Activity Process:** In the interview with playwright Idris Goodwin (Theater 41: Meet the Playwright) he discusses his interest in history and how he uses history to help form many of his plays. For the purpose of this activity, have students view an historic event they are studying through any of the different perspectives below and then create different works about that history through one or more of those perspectives.

1. Explore the historic event as an historian: Have students study the history of the event as an historian would and determine how best an historian could present the information of that history to others. To share what they have learned with their student peers or another audience of your or their choosing, have them write an historical essay or article describing the event and its implications.
2. Explore the historic event as a playwright: Have students study the history of the event and determine how best a playwright could present the information of that history to others. To share what they have learned with the student peers or another audience of your or their choosing, have them write a dramatic scene depicting the event and its implications. Include appropriate characters, dialogue, and scene description as needed.
3. Explore the historic event as short story writer: Have students study the history of the event and determine how best a short story writer could present the information of that history to others. To share what they have learned with the student peers or another audience of your or their choosing, have them write a short story depicting the event and its implications. Include appropriate characters, dialogue, plot development, scenic descriptions, and any other short story elements as needed as needed.
4. Explore the historic event as a newspaper reporter of the time: Have students study the history of the event and determine how best a newspaper reporter of the time of the event could present the information of that story to others. To share what they have learned with the student peers or another audience of you're their choosing, have them write a newspaper article depicting the event and its implications.
5. Explore the historic event as a participant: Have students take the perspective of being an individual involved in the historic event and write a journal entry describing the event and implications in their diary or write a letter they send to a family member or friend. Have them share the journal entry or letter with their student peers or another audience of your or their choosing.
6. Explore the event from another perspective of your or their choosing and then share that perspective with their student peers or another audience of your or their choosing.

### Activity Variations:

1. Have students respond to each other's writing and discuss any or all of the following questions:
  - a. Did any of the history change as a result of the medium used to tell the story? Were certain events left out or individuals involved modified in any way to fit the medium?
  - b. Was each medium able to provide an avenue for an accurate telling of the history? Was one medium more difficult to do that in?
  - c. How did the different mediums create different responses in people as they read the different works? Did some mediums appeal to you more than others? If so, why?
  - d. Are there certain advantages or disadvantages to any of the mediums in telling the historic story accurately?
  - e. Are there certain advantages or disadvantages to any of the mediums in compelling audience interest in the historic story?
  - f. Did any specific details of the historic event seem to emerge more easily/readily because of the medium chosen? For example, did you have the opportunity to share and learn different information via the journal entry than the newspaper article or the short story?
  - g. What does this exercise cause you to think about "sources of history" and how they might affect your perception and understanding of an historic event? Should each medium be judged equally appropriate for accurately presenting an audience with an historic story or not? Why?
  - h. How did this exercise affect your understanding of the historic event you were studying? Do you feel you learned more or less than if you had approached the study simply by reading the textbook description of the event, news stories of the time, or historic articles about the event?
  
2. Consider having students submit a PDF of their historic essay, short story, dramatic scene, newspaper entry, or journal entry for possible publication on the Educate.Today website. Please be sure that the submission is appropriate for the website's audience. As part of the interactive nature of Educate.Today, we welcome submissions from teachers and students to publish on the website and extend the conversation to more teachers and students as they visit the website. If you are interested in potentially having one of your student PDFs published on the website, contact us at [info@educate.today](mailto:info@educate.today) and put "Publishing Historic Medium Example" in the title line.
  
3. Based on any of the discussion questions above or ones of your own, have students create a short video answering the question (60 seconds maximum) that would be appropriate for publication on our Educate.Today website. As part of the interactive nature of Educate.Today, we welcome submissions from teachers and students to publish on the website and extend the conversation to more teachers and students as they visit the website. If you are interested in potentially having one of your student videos published on the website, contact us at [info@educate.today](mailto:info@educate.today) and put "Publishing Cassius History Discussion Video" in the title line.

## Activity 2: Studying the History Surrounding the Play

This activity can be done by individual students, students in small groups, or an entire class.

**Activity Process:** The play, “And In this Corner...Cassius Clay” tells the story of young Cassius Clay from age 12 up to the moment in his early twenties when he is about to fight Sonny Liston. The events in the play span the history of much of America’s civil rights movement in the 1950’s and the 1960’s as well as other events in the life of Cassius Clay himself including his gold medal winning experience at the Rome Olympics. Specific civil rights events alluded to in the play include the killing of Emmett Till, “whites only” restaurants and other Jim Crow practices, sit ins, bus boycotts, and the work of the Freedom Riders. For this activity, have students explore their understanding of the history of this era through any combination of the following:

1. What was your level of familiarity with the killing of Emmett Till, the existence of “whites only” restaurants, or the work of the Freedom Riders before viewing scenes from the play (Theater 43: Scene 1; Theater 44: Scene 2; Theater 45: Scene 3) included on the Educate.Today website? If you had little or no knowledge of those events, how, if in any way, did the scenes from the play change your knowledge of those events? How did the scenes make you feel about those events and how people involved in them might have felt? If you had good knowledge of those events, how accurately do you think the playwright depicts the emotions and impact of the events on people’s lives? Are there additional details you believe should have been included?
2. Conduct some historical research on one of the events in the play (Clay’s gold medal win in Rome, the death of Emmett Till, sit ins at “whites only” restaurants, etc.) What do you learn about the event from these additional historic sources that you did not learn about in the play? How do you think the play could be used as a “jumping off point” for someone’s exploration of this event? How do you think the play could be used as a way to increase someone’s understanding of the event? How accurately do you feel the playwright has depicted the events and the emotions surrounding them?

### Activity Variation:

1. Consider having students submit a PDF or short video of their response to this activity that they would like us to consider for publication on the Educate.Today website. PDFs should be no longer than two pages and videos should be no longer than 60 seconds. Please be sure that the submission is appropriate for the website’s audience. As part of the interactive nature of Educate.Today, we welcome submissions from teachers and students to publish on the website and extend the conversation to more teachers and students as they visit the website. If you are interested in potentially having one of your student videos or PDFs published on the website, contact us at [info@educate.today](mailto:info@educate.today) and put “Publishing Cassius Historic Response” in the title line.

### **Activity 3: Does history fascinate you, too?**

This activity can be done by individual students, students in small groups, or an entire class.

**Activity Process:** During the course of the interview with playwright Idris Goodwin (Theater 41: Meet the Playwright), he talks about his interest in history as well as using events in history to explore the themes and ideas of his plays. In a personal journal entry, essay, or conversation with classmates, discuss your “interest in history.” Is it similar to, or different from, that of Mr. Goodwin? What interests you about reading, hearing, or seeing stories history? What frustrates you about reading, hearing, or seeing stories of history? Did anything Mr. Goodwin said make you rethink your perspective on history as an interesting subject to explore? If so, what was it and how did it make you rethink your point of view? Are stories of history something you have found interesting seeing on stage in a play before? If so, what are some examples of plays you saw that you liked? Why did you like them? Do you think it’s possible for people to successfully learn about history through plays or other entertainment mediums? Why or why not? How might the medium of theater as a source for stories of history appeal to

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