

FIVE PRESIDENTS

By **Rick Cleveland** | Directed by **Mark Clements**

Executive Producers **Carol & Rob Manegold**

A Co-Production with **Arizona Theatre Company**

This Teacher Guide is designed to be used in the classroom along with The Rep's Play Guide for *Five Presidents*.

These are some suggested activities for your classroom. The Play Guide is available online at
<http://www.milwaukeerep.com/Tickets/2014-15-Season/Five-Presidents-Play-Guide/>

MAKING HISTORY

DISCUSS: Pre-Show Question

- What are the biggest historical events you recall from your lifetime? Why do they stand out?
- It is often quoted that "history is written by the winners." What does this mean? Do you think it is true?

DISCUSS: Post-Show Question

- How does knowing or not knowing the historical context relating to *Five Presidents* affect the way we as audience members view and interact with this story?

WRITE & PERFORM: Historical Readers Theater

In groups, have students choose one of the historical events mentioned in *Five Presidents*. After researching their topics, students should write short scripted scenes in the Readers Theater style that depict all or a part of that historical event. [See here for examples of Readers Theater: www.thebestclass.org/rtscripts.html] In groups, students should assign roles and perform their stories for the class, considering movement, voice, gestures, and basic staging options.

To debrief: *What aspects of your historical event did you choose to highlight? What characters were present and why? Do you think it gives a comprehensive summary of the event? Do you think your version of it was unbiased? What do we have to consider when writing about real historical events?*



Martin L'Herault (Carter), and Jeff Steitzer (Ford). Photo by Tim Fuller.

TEACHER GUIDE

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Teacher Guide written by Deanie Vallone, Education Intern

Edited by Jenny Toutant, Education Director;

Lindsey Hoel-Neds, Education Associate;

& Hope Parow, Education Assistant

SUGGESTED TEACHING TOPICS

- 1.) Making History
- 2.) Social Issues
- 3.) The Six Presidents of *Five Presidents*



Mark Jacoby (Bush), Martin L'Herault (Carter), Brit Whittle (Clinton), Steve Sheridan (Reagan), and Jeff Steitzer (Ford) in *Five Presidents*. Photo by Tim Fuller.

SOCIAL ISSUES

DISCUSS: Pre-Show Questions

- When running for president, candidates often take on social issues that are important to them. Do you think our political leaders have more responsibility to address social issues? In what ways can we as citizens help with social change?

DISCUSS: Post-Show Questions

- The presidents in the play discuss their social responsibilities and failures. Overall, do you think presidents help make our country a better place? How could they improve their work?
- On which social issues should our next president focus?

RESEARCH & DESIGN: If I Were President...

Students will be developing their own presidential campaign portfolios. They can look to real presidential campaigns for examples, and their portfolios can include written, visual, and multimedia material. Each student should prepare the following in their portfolios, making sure to include sufficient research and personal explanations to support their choices:

- Running mate (*Vice Presidential candidate*)
- Campaign message (*main ideas to present to voters*)
- Financial breakdown & fundraising ideas
- Slogan & promotional images/materials
- Example speech for a political rally
- Social issue to address & brief social action plan
- Tour (*which cities to visit & why*)

Have students briefly present their campaign portfolios to the class, explaining their choices.

To debrief: *Around what central ideas did you choose to focus your campaign? What factors — financial, social, political, etc. — influenced you in the development of your project? What areas were the easiest and the most difficult to plan? Did you draw on any other presidents' campaigns as inspiration for your own, and why?*

THE SIX PRESIDENTS OF *FIVE PRESIDENTS*

See the *Five Presidents* Play Guide page 3 for biographies of the show's six presidents.

DISCUSS: Pre-Show Questions

- What prior knowledge do you have of these six presidents?
- Have you ever seen one of our presidents speak on TV? What did you think about his message and delivery?
- How might you expect ex-Presidents to act with one another and with a current president?
- What roles should our presidents play in our society? What roles *do* they play? What qualities should a president possess?

DISCUSS: Post-Show Questions

- Rick Cleveland wrote about real political figures and a real historic occasion, but the dialogues between the men in *Five Presidents* are fictional. What do you think he had to keep in mind when writing about real, iconic figures and about American history?
- The presidents in the play are members of "the most exclusive club in the world." What different allegiances or old grudges did you see at work in the story, and how did that affect the narrative?

PUBLIC SPEAKING: Presidential Speeches

See the *Five Presidents* Play Guide page 12 for Rick Cleveland's interview about the play.

Have students choose a famous speech by one of the five presidents, such as an Inauguration Speech or State of the Union Address. Make sure the speech is no longer than two pages. Discuss with students that speeches are meant to inform, to instruct, to entertain, and to persuade, and to find these elements at work in their chosen speeches. Have students read and analyze the text of their chosen speech. Next have them watch a recording of their speech, analyzing the delivery. Have students compare and contrast the two versions of the speech.

Extension Activity: Have students determine how they would improve the speech either in writing or delivery. Have students present their speeches to the class, paying close attention to their delivery style, the historical context of the speech, and the speech's intention and purpose.

To debrief: *What was the president's intention behind the speech? Was he trying to hide something, persuade an audience, apologize, set goals, etc.? What did you have to know about the historical context in order to properly analyze the speech? What kind of writing style do you see present in the speech? Did that affect how the speech was delivered? Describe the president's delivery style, and how it was informed by the writing. What would you change about either the writing or the delivery of the speech?*



Mark Jacoby (Bush), Steve Sheridan (Reagan), and Jeff Steitzer (Ford). Photo by Tim Fuller.

OTHER TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION & RESEARCH

- 1.) Politics in Art, Theater, and Literature
- 2.) Historical Fiction
- 3.) The Historical Development of the Presidency

STANDARDS

Common Core State Standards:

English Language Arts

- RL.8-12.3** NARRATIVE DEVELOPMENT
RL.8-12.4 WORD CHOICE
RI.8-12 ARGUMENTS/SEMINAL U.S. TEXTS
W.8-12.7 INFORMATIVE WRITING
W.8-12.7 RESEARCH
SL.8-12.1 COLLABORATIVE DISCUSSIONS
SL.8-12.4 PRESENTATIONS

Wisconsin Model Academic Standards:

Theater

- A.12.1** ATTEND & EVALUATE THEATRICAL PERFORMANCE

MILWAUKEE REP EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

The Education Department offers backstage tours, pre- and post-show workshops and classroom residencies.

Contact Us:

Milwaukee Repertory Theater
Education Department
108 E. Wells Street
Milwaukee, WI 53202

For questions or to schedule a workshop, please contact:

Jenny Toutant, *Education Director*
414-290-5370 • jtoutant@milwaukeerep.com
www.MilwaukeeRep.com | 414-224-9490

CONNECT WITH US ONLINE:



Like us on Facebook
and follow us on Twitter
@MilwRep to hear
about the latest news,
special offers, and
happenings at The Rep!

PROGRAMS IN THE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT RECEIVE GENEROUS FUNDING FROM:

Brewers Community Foundation
CT Charitable Fund
Einhorn Family Foundation
Ralph Evinrude Foundation
The Faye McBeath Foundation

Greater Milwaukee Association of Realtors Youth Foundation
Greater Milwaukee Foundation
Harley-Davidson Foundation
Helen Bader Foundation

The Herzfeld Foundation
Frieda and William Hunt Memorial Trust
Dorothy Watkins Inbusch Foundation
Johnson Controls
Manpower Group

Milwaukee Public Schools
Northwestern Mutual
Quarles & Brady
WE Energies Foundation
Milwaukee Arts Board