

**Teacher Tool 253: The Cassius Project—
Television Production
Activity Ideas**

This teacher tool provides activity ideas in the area of Television Production 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 Television Production
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Activity Idea 1: Filming Scenes in a Play

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

Activity Process: Have students view any or all of the three scenes from the play (Theater 43: Scene 1; Theater 44: Scene 2; Theater 45: Scene 3) that are included on our Educate.Today website. The scenes were filmed live during one of Metro Theater Company's matinee performances in front of a full house audience. After viewing the scenes, have students respond to any of the discussion questions below (as well as questions of your own) in either written form or through small group or whole class discussion. Potential discussion starter questions include:

1. What did you notice about the physical arrangement of the theater space that would influence decisions made regarding camera placement? Think both in terms of the audience area as well as the stage.
2. Based on what you noticed about the physical arrangement of the theater space, why do you think the television director chose to place the cameras where she did? Would you have changed any of the cameras' locations? If so, why? Is there a specific moment from a scene you believe would have been captured differently with a new camera placement?
3. Based on viewing the scenes, how many cameras do you believe were used in the filming? What about how the scenes were filmed makes you think that number of cameras was used?
4. What logistical, technical, and financial considerations might have influenced the amount of cameras used? What about the physical arrangement of the theater might have influenced the amount of cameras used?
5. How did the stage lighting affect the filming of the scenes? How do you think being dependent on stage lighting rather than television production lighting might have affected the director's choices about camera placement?
6. How do you think filming the scenes live in front of audience might have influenced the television choices concerning camera placement, shots used, etc. What could have been done differently if an audience had not been in the theater? Why do you think the decision was made to film with an audience in attendance? Which would you prefer: to film with or without the audience? Why?
7. What kind of rehearsal, if any, do you think was helpful/necessary before filming the scenes live? As a cameraperson or television director, what steps would you take to best prepare yourself to film the scenes?

Activity Variations:

1. After viewing the scenes and discussing any of the questions above or additional ones you created, what questions do your students have for the television director concerning the filming of the scenes, camera setup, choice of shots used, etc.? As part of the interactive nature of Educate.Today we welcome responses from teachers and students to what they have viewed on the website. If you'd like to e-mail any of these questions to the television director for her response, please do so at info@educate.today and put the words "Questions about Filming Scenes" in the subject line.

Activity Idea 2: What would you ask in the interview?

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

Activity Process: Before viewing the interview with playwright Idris Goodwin (Theater 41: Meet the Playwright), have students think about what they would want to ask the playwright and why. Have them consider the audience that would be watching the interview as part of the Cassius Project website and discuss how that would influence the questions they would ask. Let the students know that Mr. Goodwin was available for 40 minutes to do the interview and have them discuss how that time frame might influence what questions they would ask and the order in which they would ask them. As additional steps to think about potential questions to ask, students might also want to look at the playwright's website to learn more about him and check out Metro Theater Company's website to learn more about the play.

Once students have completed their research, have them develop the five questions each believe would be most important to ask the playwright and the order in which they would ask the question. If all students in the class are participating in this activity, students could discuss their potential questions with each other to determine, as a group, the five they believe would be most important and the order in which they would ask them.

Once students have determined their questions, have them view the interview and compare the questions they would have chosen to ask to the ones that were asked. Looking once again at the audience that is watching the interview on Educate.Today and the 40 minutes available for the interview, how would they evaluate the questions asked? Do they find them all appropriate? Why or why not? Would they like to insert one or more of their questions into the interview? If so, where would they ask the question? Why at that point? Would they choose to eliminate any of the questions asked? Do they believe one or more of their questions would have been more appropriate? If so, why? Would they now change any of the five questions they would have asked? If so, what question would they change it to? Why?

Activity Variations:

1. Have students consider how their questions would change if the audience for the interview was different. What would be their top five questions if the audience was:
 - a. Adults reading an arts/culture magazine
 - b. TV viewers watching an arts/entertainment program
 - c. TV viewers watching a news story on the production
 - d. Another audience of your choice
2. Have students consider how their questions would change if the time frame for the interview was different. What, if anything, would change if they had:
 - a. Half hour
 - b. Hour
3. Consider the same activity idea for the interview with the cast and director. For that interview, sixty minutes was available. What would be their top five questions? In what order would they ask them? Watch the interview and then engage in the same evaluation process afterward using the questions above.

4. What questions do they have for the interviewer concerning the set up of the interview, questions asked, final edit, etc. As part of the interactive nature of Educate.Today, we welcome responses from teachers and students to what they have viewed on the website. If you'd like to e-mail any of these questions to the interviewer for his response, please do so at info@educate.today and put the words "Questions about Idris Goodwin Interview" in the subject line.

Activity Idea 3: How would you set up the interview?

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

Activity Process: Before viewing the interview with the cast and director (Theater 42: Meet the Players), have students think about how they might set up/arrange/divide up an interview with those individuals. As they determine the procedure they would most want to follow, have them consider the following questions:

1. Would they prefer to interview every member of the cast or only certain ones? Why?
2. What would be reasons to interview every member of the cast?
3. What would be reasons to interview only certain members of the cast?
4. Based on the audience who will be watching the interview on the Educate.Today website, how would that influence how many, and which, cast members to interview? How might having a different intended audience for the interview affect decisions made regarding the shoot?
5. What would be reasons to include the director with cast members in the interview?
6. What would be reasons to have a separate interview with the director?
7. How might time available and location available for the interview affect the decision on who and how many to include in the interview?
8. How would the questions change and conversation change if cast members were interviewed in small groups or individually rather than as an entire cast? What topics might not be covered in small groups or individual settings that could be covered with the entire cast? What are examples of questions that might make sense if cast members were interviewed individually or in small groups rather than as an entire cast?
9. What logistical and technical issues would be worth considering to help guide your decision about whether the interviews would be done with fewer people or the entire cast?
10. How might your role as interviewer change depending on how many individuals are being interviewed at the same time? What amount of people would you be most comfortable interviewing at any one time? Why?
11. How might your role as television director of the shoot change depending on how many individuals are being interviewed at the same time? What amount of people would you be most comfortable being in the shoot at one time? Why?
12. How might your role as cameraperson or audio engineer on the shoot change depending on how many individuals are being interviewed at the same time? What amount of people would you be most comfortable being in the shoot at one time? Why?

After considering any number of the questions above, provide students this additional information that was true for the interview when it was conducted:

- a. All cast members wanted to be interviewed as did the director.
- b. The theater company made sure the eleven cast members and the director would be available for the interview for a total number of 12 individuals to be interviewed.

- c. The cast and director preferred to do the interview(s) within a two-hour window one afternoon after a matinee performance earlier in the morning that same day.
- d. The interview could not be conducted in the theater used for the performance because another event was happening in that space later that day.
- e. The interview was taped to camera live in one uninterrupted shoot. The footage from the performances was edited in during post-production.

With this additional information, have students revisit any of the ten questions included in the activity. Would any of their answers change? If so, why?

Have students watch the interview and evaluate the flow of the conversation, camera angles used, editing decisions, etc. As they evaluate the interview, have them consider the following questions:

- a. What information was covered especially well? What could have been covered better?
- b. Would they have asked anything that wasn't asked?
- c. Did they notice that each cast member was asked at least one question? Why do they think the interviewer decided to do that?
- d. How did the fact that the entire cast was included affect the flow of the conversation?
- e. In what ways was the inclusion of the entire cast and director a positive for the interview?
- f. Were there any ways that the inclusion of the entire cast and director was a negative for the interview? If so, how?
- g. What was your response to having scenes from the production edited into the final version of the interview and placed over the cast members' and director's words at various points? How was it helpful to a viewer of the interview? Were there any places where you found it distracting or unnecessary? Why? Were there any places you would have like to have seen additional footage that was not included? Where? Why?
- h. How well do you think the television director and camera persons did following the flow of the conversation, calling for shots as needed, obtaining shots as needed? What do you think might have been the challenges of filming the interview in one live, uninterrupted shoot, rather than stopping and starting again as needed? Which method would you have preferred to film the interview in: live and uninterrupted or stopping if/as needed? Why do you think the interviewer and director chose to film the interview uninterrupted?
- i. How well do you think the audio engineer did following the flow of the conversation? What would have been challenges faced by the audio engineer with so many people being interviewed in one group and the interview being filmed in an uninterrupted manner? As you may have noticed in the interview, the interviewer, director and first row of guests each had "hard-wired" microphones, but the second row of guests shared a hand-held microphone. What do you think might have caused this choice to be made? How, if in any way, might that choice have affected the interview?

Activity Variations:

1. What questions do they have for the interviewer, audio engineer, camerapersons, television director concerning the set up of the interview, questions asked, decision to include all cast members and director together, camera angles and shots chosen, final edit, etc. As part of the interactive nature of Educate.Today, we welcome responses from teachers and students to what they have viewed on the website. If you'd like to e-mail any of these questions to the interviewer for his response, please do so at info@educate.today and put the words "Questions about Cassius Cast Interview" in the subject line.