

The Alabama Shakespeare Festival 2009 Activity Guide for



by Michael Vigilant
A Southern Writers' Project premiere



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Curriculum Connection

HISTORY/SOCIAL STUDIES

The Great Depression in the South

Bear Bryant grew up in rural Arkansas. He was a teenager and college student during the Great Depression.

1. Examine the effects of the Depression on the people of the South. Did it affect white Southerners differently than black Southerners? Rural Southerners (like Bryant's family) differently than urban Southerners?
2. Examine the role the federal government played in aiding the poor and in stabilizing the economy as a whole (WPA, the New Deal, etc.) Tie that to today's economic woes. Schedule an in-class debate about the role our current government should play in solving the financial crisis and pulling the nation out of Recession.

Integration and the Civil Rights Era

On June 11, 1963 – five years after Bear Bryant took over as coach of the Crimson Tide – Governor George Wallace made national news when he stood on the steps of Foster Auditorium on UA's campus to block the enrollment of two black students, Vivian Malone and James Hood. President Kennedy mobilized the National Guard to force their admittance.

UA didn't get its first black football player until eight years later, in 1971. Some critics accused Bryant of not pushing hard enough to integrate the team.

1. Examine the events surrounding that famous Civil Rights moment. Some possible research topics for students:
 - How did integration proceed at other major Southern universities?
 - What happened to George Wallace?
 - What happened to the two black students? Where are they today?
 - What percentage of UA students today are black or members of other minority groups?
2. Investigate the history of sports integration. This could be structured as a class project, with individuals or teams assigned reports on the process of integration in various sports and at various levels of sports (high school vs. college vs. professional). Within the world of college sports, they might also look into differences between Southern universities and those in other parts of the country, and between private and public universities.

Bear Bryant and Libel Law

Bear Bryant found himself in the middle of a major scandal in 1963 when the Saturday Evening Post reported that an Atlanta businessman had overheard a troubling telephone conversation between Bryant and University of Georgia athletic director Wally Butts. The man claimed Butts gave away team secrets to help Alabama win the game.

Bryant and Butts said this was untrue and sued the Saturday Evening Post for libel. Bryant eventually won a \$300,000 settlement. Butts' case went to trial, and he won more than \$3 million, though that figure was later reduced. The Butts case set important precedents involving libel law that journalists still refer to today.

1. Use the Bryant and Butts cases as a jumping-off point to investigate some basic legal terms and issues, e.g. libel, slander, settlement, judgment.
2. Use the Bryant and Butts cases as a jumping-off point to investigate the rules of libel in this country. What, legally, can and can't you say about someone? Do certain kinds of people get more protection under the law than others? Can you libel someone who is dead? Bring in local newspapers and have students look for potentially libelous statements and study the different wordings in stories about (alleged) criminals who have not yet been tried and those who have been convicted.

CHARACTER EDUCATION

A Letter Home

In the play, Bear Bryant says he made his players write a letter to their parents every week, "even if it [was] just to complain about me."

In today's high-tech world, many students may never have written an actual letter. Have them write one to take home to a family member. If they don't know what to say, tell them just to write about what they've been doing in classes that week.

Making the Most of a Day

As the play opens, Bryant seems to be in prayer. "This is the beginning of a new day," he says. "I can waste it or I can use it for good. What I do today is very important because I am exchanging a day of my life for it. When tomorrow comes, this day will be gone forever..."

Ask students to write down ways that they "waste" days. Then have them write down one short-term goal, and list one thing they can do each day for the rest of the week to bring them closer to that goal.

Learning to Lose

Nobody likes losing, least of all Bear Bryant. “I hate to lose,” he said, “but if you never lose, you never learn how to handle defeat.”

Ask students to think about a time when they lost something. It could be a game, an argument, a contest. Have them write a short essay about what happened and how they reacted to it. Did they learn anything from it? Did the experience change them in any way? Would they do anything differently if they had to go back in time and lose again?

SCIENCE

Fruit Poisoning

Bryant believed his father died from eating a bad watermelon. Have students research how a watermelon could poison someone. Was it most likely a case of a toxic substance seeping into the fruit or of the watermelon spoiling? (And what happens chemically when fruit spoils?)

Not-So-Dry Cleaning

For about a year, Bryant co-owned a dry-cleaning business in Tuscaloosa. Ask students to research how dry cleaning works. Is it really dry? What chemicals are involved in the process? What kinds of fabric require dry cleaning and why?

On One Leg

When he was a member of the Alabama team, Bear Bryant played in a game despite a broken leg. He even caught a pass and ran it in for a touchdown. Have students research how bones heal. How can something that’s broken come back together? How long does it take? What can go wrong in the process?

ENGLISH/LITERATURE

Be a Playwright

After students have seen the play, ask them to write their own short, one-person play about life of a famous person. They could do this individually or in small groups. First they’ll need to research the person’s life, then turn it into a story with a beginning, middle and end. Make sure they think through the narrative structure and what the climactic moment (or moments) of that person’s life are. Before they write, they should ask themselves questions about how their character thinks and talks and what other characters might need to have voices in the play.

See Appendix A for a few sample pages of the *Bear Country* script that students can use as a guideline for the playwriting format.

FAMILY AND CONSUMER SCIENCE

Hot Enough for Ya?

In *Bear Country*, Bryant goes to recruit a player in South Alabama, where he eats in a restaurant whose owner ends up being the grandfather of a future player. While he's there, he eats the best hot pepper sauce he's ever tasted. Have students make their own hot sauce. If they bring in miniature bottles, they can take some home. Dozens of hot sauce recipes are available at www.pepperfool.com.

A Little Less Fat with That

In that same scene, the Bear eats a classic Southern meal: chitlins, collard greens, black-eyed peas and cornbread. Have students research how many calories are in this and other classic Southern dishes. Then explore together ways to modify these dishes so that they're still tasty but less fattening and cholesterol-heavy.

MATHEMATICS

A Number of Possibilities

Bring math to life by using the numbers from Bear Bryant's career to devise word problems appropriate to particular classes. Let students figure out for themselves just how amazing the Bear's stats were. You'll find his career record here:

<http://www.angelfire.com/al/bamacrimsonside/bearbryant.html>; additional records are available through the Bear Bryant Museum website, at www.bearbryantmuseum.ua.edu.

Additional Resources

WEBSITES

www.bearbryantmuseum.ua.edu

The Bear Bryant Museum's website contains photos, statistics, a biography, timeline and much more.

www.espn.go.com/classic/biography/s/Bryant_Bear.html

A nice overview of Bryant's career and legacy.

BOOKS

The Last Coach: A Life of Paul "Bear" Bryant by Allen Barra

ISBN: 978-0393059823

A meticulously researched, 608-page biography.

Bear: My Hard Life and Good Times as Alabama's Head Coach by Paul "Bear" Bryant with John Underwood

ISBN: 978-1572438880

Bryant's autobiography comes with a CD in which the Bear himself speaks.

Career in Crisis: Paul "Bear" Bryant and the 1971 Season of Change by John David Briley

ISBN: 978-0881460254

A close examination of the season in which black football players first came to UA and Bryant began using the wishbone offense.

Bear's Boys: 36 Men Whose Lives Were Changed by Coach Paul Bryant by Eli Gold and M.B. Roberts

ISBN: 978-1401603243

Inspirational stories of football players (including Joe Namath and Bob Baumhower) and what they learned from Bryant.

The Junction Boys: How Ten Days in Hell Forged a Championship Team by Jim Dent

ISBN: 978-0312267551

When Bryant took over the losing Texas A&M team, he put them through a training camp they would never forget and turned them into a team bound for a national title.

Rammer Jammer Yellow Hammer: A Road Trip into the Heart of Fan Mania by Warren St. John

ISBN: 978-0609807132

Not a book about the Bear, but a fascinating look at the intensity of UA fans and tailgaters, written by a native now at the New York Times.

Additional Resources

VIDEO

The Bear (1984). Directed by Richard A. Sarafian. Starring Gary Busey.

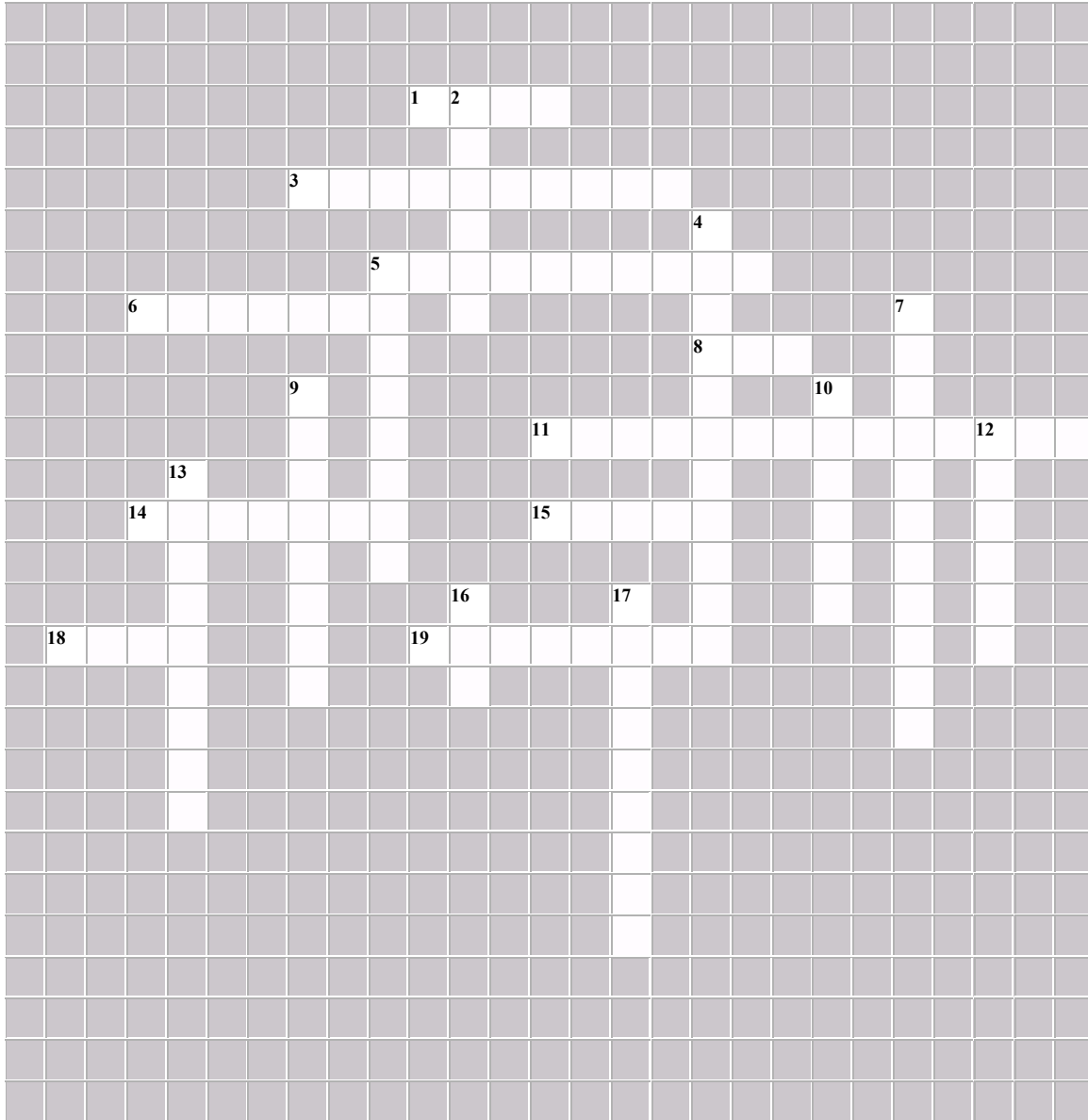
The Junction Boys (2002). Directed by Mark Robe. Starring Tom Berenger.

Name _____

Date _____

Coach's Crossword

Complete the puzzle.



DOWN

- 2. UA's biggest rival
- 4 Bryant's brand of potato chips (2 words)
- 5 First university where Bryant was head coach
- 7 Bryant once co-owned a _____ business
- 9 Bryant got his nickname because he _____ a bear
- 10 I ain't never been nothin' but a _____
- 12 Number of brothers and sister Bryant had
- 13 Bryant once played a game with this injury (2 words)
- 16 Number of national championships Bryant won
- 17 Famous Jets quarterback who played for the Bear (2 words)

ACROSS

- 1 Branch of armed forces Bryant served during WWII
- 3 Name of Bear Bryant's hometown (2 words)
- 5 Coach Bryant's wife (2 words)
- 6 Bryant was accused of fixing a game against _____
- 8 It's not the size of the _____ in the fight; It's the size of the _____ in the dog.
- 11 First African-American to play football at UA (2 words)
- 14 _____ Tide
- 15 Bryant sued the Saturday Evening Post for _____
- 18 _____ Bowl
- 19 Famous style of offense in the 1970s

APPENDIX A

What follows are sample pages from the *Bear Country* script. The first page shows how to list the cast, the setting, the time and what the stage looks like when the play begins. Then it skips ahead a few pages to show how dialogue and stage directions are written in theatrical scripts.

BEAR COUNTRY

by
Michael Vigilant

Cast

Young Bryant
Coach Bryant
Radio/Television Announcer
Friend
Coach Cowan
Coach Hank
Football Player
Post Writer
Technician
Attorney
Grandpa
Taunting Voice

(Parts are spread among four actors)

Setting

Coach Bryant's memories.

Time

The present.

At Rise

Young Bryant is standing atop a tower overlooking the audience. The tower is representative of the platform overlooking the practice field at the University of Alabama. Coach Bryant storytells on the main floor/football field. Behind him are layered platforms on which events take place in his life. The set also contains Bryant's desk and a goalpost.

Denny Chimes sound.

Coach Bryant

My family moved to the big city in my teens. Fordyce had a movie house, hotel, a street light, a high school and about three thousand people....As far as I was concerned, it could have been New York City.

Coach Cowan

Want to be a Redbug?

Coach Bryant

The team was run by Coach Bob Cowan. I'd never met a man like him before. He's somebody I looked up to.

Young Bryant

What's a Redbug?

Coach Bryant

Hung on his every word.

Coach Cowan

It's a football player; a damn good football player.

Young Bryant

Yes, sir.

Coach Cowan

You're big for your age. Look strong.

Coach Bryant

I was big. I was strong. I had a big chip on my shoulder and I liked to fight.

Coach Cowan

What position do you play?

Young Bryant

I dunno.

Coach Bryant

I didn't know what position to play. Didn't know the rules. But my first assignment gave me an idea.

Coach Cowan

I'm going to make the game simple for you, boy.

See that fella down the field catching the ball?

Young Bryant

Yes, Sir.

Coach Cowan

Run down there and kill'em.

(Observing Young Bryant run and make a tackle.)

Coach Bryant

Coach wanted to see how hard I could hit someone.

Coach Cowan

Lord...have mercy.

Hey, boy, you can stop tackling 'em now! Hey! You made the team—if ya don't go to jail for manslaughter.

