

# NORTHLIGHT THEATRE

## Season Access Curriculum Preview

October 10, 2019



### Joan of Arc & the Hundred Years War

Joan of Arc was born to Jacques d'Arc and Isabelle Romée in Domrémy in the early 15th century. Her year of birth is believed to be 1412.

Her parents were humble peasants. Joan was strongly inclined towards religion from a young age. She started experiencing divine visions when she was around 12 or 13 years old. She felt a voice commanding her to serve the French nation by driving out the English. She also had visions of saints like St. Michael and, as is discussed often in *Mother of the Maid*, St. Catherine.

As a teenager, Joan served her country through leading an army. This was progressive for the 1400s and Joan's mother was skeptical of both Joan's visions and her capacity to lead at such a young age. Nevertheless, Joan went on to lead an army to victory in the Siege of Orleans (1428–1429), solidifying her place as revolutionary female powerhouse for France during the Hundred Years War. Over time, however, her power lessened and she was used by France as a bargaining tool and handed over to England as a prisoner in 1430.



Joan's spiritual integrity and her cross dressing became the main topics of contention when she was captured. In 1431, Joan was tried and found guilty of heresy, and was burned at the stake in Rouen. After the war ended, a retrial was ordered. The trial pronounced her innocent and on July 7, 1456 she was declared a martyr. Joan of Arc was canonized and made a saint on May 16th, 1920. As a legendary figure, she is considered to be the epitome of a brave and courageous woman. She and her mother have inspired women in the centuries since her death. During her trial, Joan said of her mother: "Nobody taught me my belief, if not my mother."

*Mother of the Maid* follows Joan's mother, Isabelle Arc, as her family digests and copes with Joan becoming a revolutionary. We know that young people have the capacity to lead, but who is there to care for and guide them? Do those people always have their best interests at heart? We are encouraged by what young audiences can learn about the strength and risk of putting young people on the metaphorical and literal battlefield.

When her captors asked why she wore men's clothing, Joan replied, "Dress is but a small matter." Because she continued to wear men's clothes and continued to claim hearing voices of saints after she was captured—the pro-English Bishop of Beauvais, Pierre Cauchon, decided to excommunicate and then execute her, partly for the heresy of wearing men's clothes.

### Cross Dressing in the 13th Century

Cross dressing was generally frowned upon by medieval church and state, but there's no record of it being prosecuted or leading directly to a death sentence, except in Joan's case. The bishop determined that the devil persuaded her to dress like a man, and declared her a relapsed heretic. Joan was sentenced to death, and at the age of 19 she was burned at the stake—reportedly wearing a dress.

Despite the reversal of Joan's sentence, it would be centuries before women could wear men's clothes in public without causing a scandal. In fact, a French law forbidding women from wearing pants remained on the books until 2013. The law required Parisian women to ask permission from city authorities before "dressing as men." In *Mother of the Maid*, Joan and her mother grapple with her choice of clothing and the final moments of the play illuminate how cross-dressing contributed to Joan's fate.

### Resource!

Interview with Glenn Close about playing Joan's mother:  
["NPR: She's Mom to a Headstrong Teen"](#)

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