



Education

GRADES 9—12

SCHOOL-TIME  
PERFORMANCES

Study Guide

by Samuel Taylor Coleridge  
Performed by Fiona Shaw and Daniel Hay-Gordon  
Directed by Phyllida Lloyd  
Part of Global Connections  
Tuesday, December 17, 2013

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A close-up, profile photograph of a woman with dark hair, looking thoughtfully to the left. She is wearing a dark, collared shirt. The background is a soft, out-of-focus grey.

The  
Rime  
of the Ancient  
Mariner

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## DEAR EDUCATOR

Welcome to the study guide for the production of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* that you will be attending as part of BAM Education's Global Connections series. At this performance, the world-famous Irish actress and director Fiona Shaw will bring to life the strange, haunting epic of this first of the great English Romantic poems. As she has done so brilliantly in the past with her landmark performance of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and, most recently, with the story of the Virgin Mother in last year's *The Testament of Mary*, Ms. Shaw manages the miraculous in staging the unstageable. More importantly, she rips poetry from its passive, often dust-bound existence on the page and restores it to its rightful and ancient place as an oral storytelling tradition. In the hands of Ms. Shaw and her collaborators, *Rime* becomes a kinetic, visceral spectacle that mirrors the existential grief, anguish, and terror of the subject matter.

## YOUR VISIT TO BAM

The BAM program includes this study guide, a pre-performance workshop in your classroom led by a BAM teaching artist, the performance itself, and a post-performance discussion at BAM.

## HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Arts experiences always work best when themes, ideas, and elements from the performance are tied in to your curricular plans. At the end of this guide, you will find suggested classroom activities and ideas that you may implement before or after seeing the production. The overall goals of this guide are to connect to the Common Core State Standards with relevant information and activities; to reinforce and encourage critical thinking and analytical skills; and to provide you with the tools and background information necessary to have an engaging and inspiring experience at BAM.

Photo: *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, by Richard Hubert Smith



## BEHIND THE SCENES

### THE COMPANY

**Fiona Shaw** has, in her 30-year career, become one of the world's most honored and admired actresses and directors of stage, screen, and television. Among her notable stage triumphs are her one-woman performance of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (Drama Desk Award), title roles in acclaimed productions of *Medea* and *Electra* (Olivier Award), Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*, and Shakespeare's *Richard II*, and a production of Samuel Beckett's *Happy Days* that was presented by BAM in 2007. She was last seen in the New York in her one-woman interpretation of Colm Tóibín's *The Testament of Mary*. On American television, she was most recently featured in the fourth season of *True Blood*. Shaw may be best known to younger audiences for her recurring role as Petunia Dursley in the *Harry Potter* films. In 2001, she was awarded the Order of the British Empire by Queen Elizabeth II.

**Daniel Hay-Gordon** trained at Legat in Sussex, England, and graduated from the Rambert School of Ballet and Contemporary Dance. He has worked with many of the world's top modern dance choreographers, and appeared in both the Athens and London productions of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*.

**Phyllida Lloyd** (*Director*) is one of England's most prominent directors of stage and film. She has directed Shakespeare and other classic works for the Royal Court Theater, the Old Vic, the Royal Shakespeare Company, and Donmar Warehouse, among many others. She directed the original British production of the ABBA musical *Mamma Mia*, as well as the film starring Meryl Streep. Among her recent successes on film was the Margaret Thatcher biopic *The Iron Lady*, also with Streep. Lloyd will be represented again in Brooklyn this season as her groundbreaking all-female production of *Julius Caesar* is presented at St. Ann's Warehouse.

### THE PRODUCTION

This adaptation of the Coleridge poem was first staged at the 2012 Epidaurus Festival in Athens, Greece on the stage of the Little Theatre of Ancient Epidaurus. Before bringing the production to BAM this fall, the company also staged a run of 18 performances at the Old Vic's Tunnels Theatre in London, a unique performance space located beneath the tunnels of the London Underground.

### A WORD FROM THE DIRECTOR

"*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* is the theatre of our childhood—of rhymes, of sticks and a rope—a world where small things carry vast meaning. Two performers make this story hang in the air, for just a moment, to live on only in the memory of the audience."



"By thy long grey beard and  
glittering eye, Now wherefore  
stopp'st thou me?"

Illustration: Gustave Doré

## SYNOPSIS

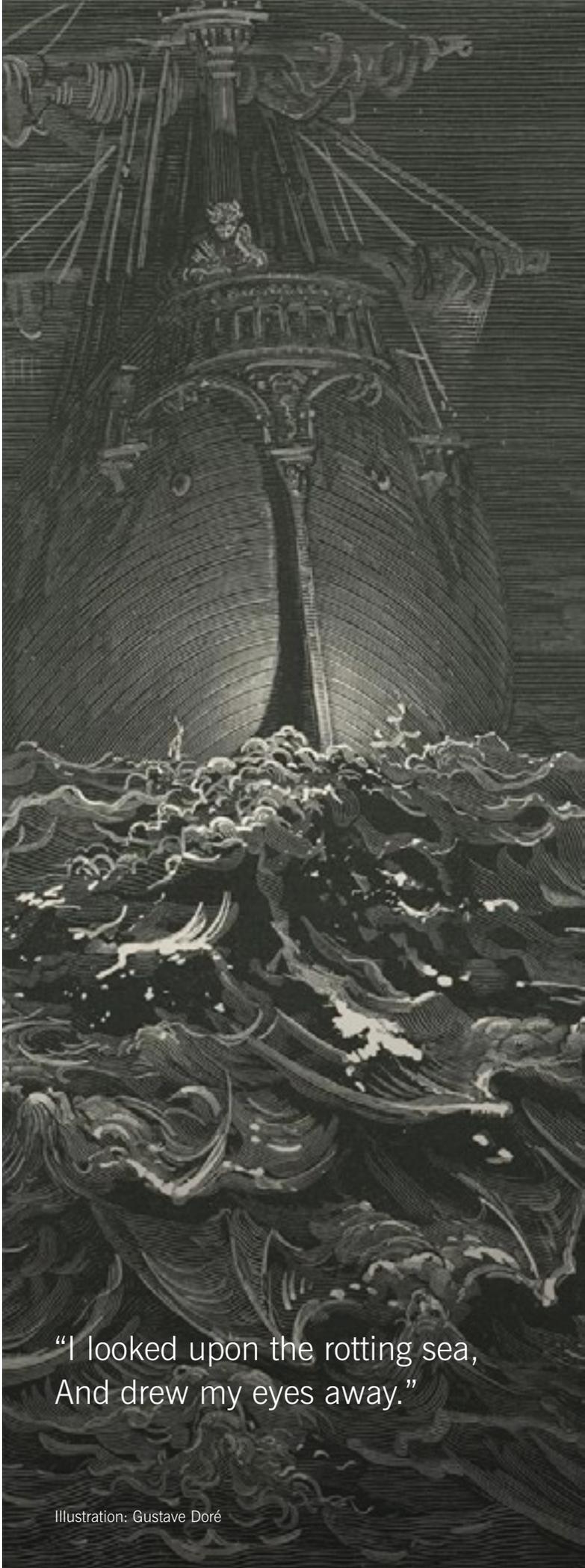
A Guest arrives at a wedding feast. As he is about to enter the party, he is accosted by a strange old man who insists that the Guest must listen to the story he has to tell. Although the Guest is reluctant, he is mesmerized by the old man, and tells him to proceed with his story. The old man (the Mariner) tells of the time when he was on a ship headed south; all was well, until a sudden storm came in and blew the ship towards the South Pole. The ship was stuck in the ice for days until an albatross, a giant sea-bird, appeared. The appearance of the bird was treated as a good omen by the sailors, and indeed the ship was soon able to break free of the ice and return north. In the central act of the poem, the Mariner, for unclear reasons, killed the albatross with his crossbow. At first his fellow sailors were furious at what the Mariner had done. But when the fog cleared and the ship could proceed more quickly, the sailors changed their mind and praised the Mariner.

The death of the albatross, however, angered certain spirits following the boat; they caused the winds to stop, and the boat was becalmed for days. As food and water run low on the desperate ship, the sailors changed their minds again and blamed the Mariner for their suffering. To symbolize his role as the scapegoat, the Mariner was forced to wear the dead albatross around his neck. Finally, a ship appeared in the distance, but as it approached, the sailors' hope of rescue turned to horror. It was a ghost ship, on which the figure of Death and that of Life-in-Death (represented here as a pale woman) were playing dice for the lives of the crew. Death won the lives of everyone on board except that of the Mariner.

One by one, the sailors died in agony; the Mariner suffered the torment of having to stare into the eyes of his unburied shipmates for seven days. Nearing madness, the Mariner chanced to see a group of sea-creatures swim by. Although he refers to them in his narration as "slimy things," at the time he suddenly understood that in spite of their ugliness, they were God's creatures as well, and he gave them his blessing.

With that, the albatross fell off his neck and the curse was lifted. Benevolent spirits inhabited the bodies of the dead sailors, and they steered the ship home. Before the ship could safely arrive, however, it was destroyed by a whirlpool and the Mariner nearly drowned. A hermit, who had been on the pilot's boat as it was guiding the ship to port, rescued the Mariner from the wreckage and brought him to safety. The Mariner asked the holy hermit to bless him with forgiveness, which the hermit proceeded to do. However, as penance for his sin of killing the albatross, the Mariner was condemned to wander the Earth to tell his story and to teach the lesson he learned: to love all of God's creations equally.

His tale ended, the Mariner leaves as suddenly as he appeared. The Guest returns home and rises the next morning a sadder but wiser man.



"I looked upon the rotting sea,  
And drew my eyes away."

## ABOUT THE POET

Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772—1834) is considered to be, along with his onetime friend William Wordsworth, one of the founders of the Romantic movement in English poetry. As with later English Romantics like Keats, Byron and Shelley, we know a great deal about Coleridge's life from the wealth of autobiographical materials and letters he left behind. As was also the case with many of the poets who followed his path, his greatest work was behind him by the time he turned thirty.

Coleridge was born in the small town of Ottery, where his father was a well-respected vicar and schoolmaster. Only six when his father died, Coleridge was sent to Christ's Hospital, a charity school. There he ardently pursued a love of reading that he claimed began when he was three. It was said of the young Coleridge that not only was he a voracious reader, but he often acted out what he read; by the age of 10, he was known as "Coleridge the Talker." Eventually, he began experimenting with writing his own poetry. He was successful enough as a student to enter Cambridge, where he became deeply impressed by the radical ideas of the poet Robert Southey.

At one point, Southey and Coleridge were part of a group that planned to build a utopian community in Pennsylvania, to be called Pantisocracy (various troubles and disputes scuttled the idea). Unfortunately, it was also at Cambridge that Coleridge first tried opium, which later became an addiction that would devastate his life and his work as a poet.

After university, Coleridge attempted a career in the military, which lasted exactly two months. He also founded *The Watchman*, a literary journal that failed after three issues. It was then that he met William Wordsworth, who inspired him to take his writing more seri-

ously. Over the next two years (1797—1798), he wrote many of the poems for which he is best known, including "Kubla Khan" (written, according to its author, under the influence of opium), "Christabel" and several so-called "conversational" poems, including "The Night-ingale." Coleridge and Wordsworth collected the best of their poetry into a single slim volume, published in 1798 as *Lyrical Ballads*. Their work became the cornerstone of English Romantic poetry, and was a powerful influence on most of the poets who followed.

Although he continued to write and publish as the 19th century began, the opium addiction started to consume his life. He travelled widely in an effort to break the addiction, but it was of no help. Eventually he separated from his wife and, in 1810, had a final split with Wordsworth. At that point, he tried his hand at editing again, creating *The Friend*, a short-lived but influential journal. Finally he moved to London and was able to manage his addiction with the help of a friend, Dr. James Gillman.

Although Coleridge essentially abandoned poetry at this point, he did not stop writing. He turned to political and literary criticism, publishing his *Biographia Literaria* in 1817. He also became one of the greatest of all writers on Shakespeare; he is often credited with saving the critical reputation of *Hamlet*, which had been generally mocked or ignored by previous critics. Coleridge's London home became a salon of sorts, and his guests included most of England's great cultural and political figures of the time.

In "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, Coleridge creates the character of "Life-in-Death," who wins the Mariner's life at dice. Perhaps Coleridge was thinking of how much he had squandered through his addiction, his own "life-in-death," when he wrote his own epitaph: "O, lift one thought in prayer for S.T.C./That he who many a year with toll of breath/Found death in life, may here find life in death!" Coleridge died in 1834.

## "Samuel Taylor Coleridge" by Washington Allston



**“The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”  
and the Birth of the English Romantic Movement**

In 1774, the young German novelist Johann Wolfgang von Goethe published his first great novel, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*. It tells the tale of a star-crossed love triangle and the title character who, to ensure the happiness of his friends, kills himself. The book was a sensation all over Europe; there were even worried reports from authorities that several young people were so moved by the novel that they killed themselves in what were apparently the first cases of copycat suicide. This was the time of the Enlightenment, of Rousseau and Voltaire, with the American Revolution just around the corner and revolt in France a decade and a half away. It was also the time of Diderot’s *Encyclopedie*, the first attempt to gather all of the world’s knowledge in one place. But the success of *Werther* was among the first indications that the rational, logical, and scientific Enlightenment was about to give way to something very different: a movement in the arts that put emotion rather than thought at its center. This was Romanticism.

Inspired by Goethe and his colleagues, Wordsworth and Coleridge took the bold step of creating poems in the new Romantic style as they assembled *Lyrical Ballads*. Although most critics feel that Wordsworth’s poems in the book are stronger overall, it is Coleridge’s poem that opens the collection. It is not too much of a stretch, then, to say that “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” is the very first English Romantic poem.

Wordsworth sets forth the Romantic ideal clearly in these verses from his poem “The Tables Turned:”

And hark, how blithe the throstle sings,  
He, too, is no mean preacher,  
Come forth into the light of things,  
Let Nature be your teacher...  
Enough of Science and of Art;  
Close up those barren leaves  
Come forth, and bring with you a heart  
That watches and receives.

Wordsworth turns the tables on what he sees as the dry, clinical rationalism of the Enlightenment and offers a different path. We know how close Wordsworth and Coleridge were when this poem was written, and although “Rime of the Ancient Mariner” is certainly not a typical poem of any particular style, it is interesting to watch this performance in light of its place in the Romantic movement.

Like every artistic movement, English Romanticism featured endless themes and variations. However, the essential ideas of the movement can be reduced to a few basic elements:

- The power of imagination, intuition and emotion over logic and reason
- The idea that we must coexist peacefully with Nature, and that we can learn more valuable lessons from Nature than from formal schooling

- The idea of “emotion recollected in tranquility” (Wordsworth’s phrase); in other words, the notion that the way to create meaningful art is to filter pure experience through contemplation
- The move away from urbanity, which had been the center of both Enlightenment thought and the growing industrial revolution, in favor of a focus on the pastoral and rural
- An obsession with the supernatural, the spiritual, and even the occult, and of transcending the barriers of our lives and minds
- An obsession with Death, both literal and creative, and ideas of immortality (perhaps best expressed in the movement’s best-known novel, Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*)



“Samuel Taylor Coleridge”  
by George Dawe

## THEMATIC ELEMENTS

**To the Educator:** As you work through the poem with your students, discuss the various themes. Have them provide the appropriate textual evidence, working preferably in pairs. Note that the themes are aligned with the Common Core standards in that they approach meaning, inference, structure/technique, and authorial intent.

Theme	For Discussion (with CCSS Standards)	Supporting Evidence
An Ecological Parable?	The message that we need to treat Nature with humility and respect has taken on new meaning in this era of climate change. Might today's albatross be an oil-slick-covered gull? How does "Rime" portray the relationship between Man and Nature, especially as viewed through the lens of the ideals of Romanticism? (RL.9-10.1, RL.9-10.2)	
Judeo-Christian Spirituality and References to the Bible	While Coleridge explicitly compares the albatross to a Christian soul, the case of the Mariner is more complex. Is he Adam, committing an original sin by killing the bird? Is he Jesus, who shoulders the burden of sin for all? Is he Cain, forced to wander in anguish for his crime? (RL.9-10.9)	
Motive and Means	The central act of the poem is described in a surprisingly detached and matter-of-fact way at the very end of Part I. Do a close reading of the verses immediately before and immediately after. From the text, what do you think the Mariner's motive for the killing might have been? In the larger context of the poem, why do you think Coleridge chose to de-emphasize this crucial moment? (RL.9-10.5)	
"Life-in-Death"	As seen before, Coleridge may have viewed his own addiction as a "life-in-death." Our popular culture is replete with characters like zombies and vampires who straddle the line between life and death. How does Coleridge's personification of "Life-in-Death" as a beautiful woman compare with these ideas? (RL.9-10.1, RL.9-10.2, RL.9-10.6)	
Isolation	The price the Mariner pays for his act is supreme isolation, famously described by Coleridge as being "alone on a wide, wide sea." How is Coleridge able to convey the horror of isolation through the use of poetic language? (RL.9-10.1, RL.9.10.2)	
The "Butterfly Effect"	We like to believe that the universe is in balance, and those who commit crimes or misdemeanors will be punished appropriately. In "Rime," however, the universe appears to be unbalanced. Do you think the punishment the Mariner and his ship-mates endure is fitting for the Mariner's crime of killing the albatross? Why or why not? (RL.9-10.1, RL.9-10.2)	
The Scapegoat	History is filled with examples of individuals or groups of people who have been blamed for the problems of an entire community or society. These people are, in Coleridge's words, forced to "wear the albatross" around their necks. What are some examples of this kind of scapegoating from history? How do these real-life events mirror or differ from the way Coleridge treats this idea in "Rime"? (RL.9-10.1, RL.9-10.6)	
The Framing Device	It was Fiona Shaw's inspiration to turn "Rime" into a performance piece. However, in a way, the poem always was a performance piece, with the Mariner telling his story to the Wedding Guest. Coleridge could simply have told us the Mariner's tale himself; why do you think he chose to have us watch the Mariner tell his tale to a stranger? (RL.9-10.5)	
"Eftsoons:" Archaic Language	Although the language Coleridge uses in "Rime" seems old-fashioned to us, you might be surprised to learn that it would have also seemed old-fashioned to the people of 1798. What are some examples of this kind of language? Why do you think Coleridge might have chosen to write in this style? (RL.9-10.5)	
Breaking Away from a Fixed Verse Structure	Before Coleridge's time, most poets would choose a verse structure (like a Shakespearean sonnet, for example) and stick with it for a whole poem. In "Rime" Coleridge keeps changing the length of his verses, his rhyme patterns, and his meter (the number of "beats" in each line). Why do you think Coleridge chose this more free, spontaneous style, and what impact does this have on our enjoyment of the poem? (RL.9-10.5)	
Repetition	If you look at early epic poems, like <i>Gilgamesh</i> or <i>The Iliad</i> and <i>The Odyssey</i> , there is a tremendous amount of repetition of phrases. One logical reason for this is that long before these stories were written down, they were told or sung by storytellers; the repetitions served as <i>mnemonic</i> devices, or memory aids. If Coleridge knew that "Rime" would be printed, why would he choose to mimic the repetitions of ancient epic poetry? What examples of these kinds of phrases can you find? (RL.9-10.1, RL.9-10.5)	
Figurative Language	When the ship becomes becalmed before the arrival of the ghost ship, Coleridge refers to the scene as being "like a painted ship on a painted ocean." This is one of the most famous similes in all of English poetry; what other examples of literary elements can you find throughout the poem? (RL.9-10.1)	

## THEMATIC ELEMENTS

**To the Educator:** These activities may be used at any point before or after you see the BAM production. You may add or subtract some of the technology-centered activities based on the availability of such resources in your school. I have used the 9th and 10th grade ELA Common Core State Standards as a kind of middle ground, since this production will be appropriate for high school students as well as upper-level middle school students

#	Description	ELA Common Core Alignment
I	To illustrate the transition from the Enlightenment to the Romantic period, show your students enlargements of David's <i>The Death of Socrates</i> (1787) and Turner's <i>Whaler's (The Whale Ship)</i> from 1841 (see next page). Have them create a simple T-chart and, either alone or with a partner, have them describe the characteristics of the two works. Then, do the same activity using the first five minutes of Mozart's <i>Eine Kleine Nachtmusik</i> and the first five minutes of Wagner's <i>Ride of the Valkyries</i> .	RL.9-10.7, W.9-10.1, SL.9-10.1
II	Have the students read a well-known poem from the Romantic era, such as Keats' "Endymion," Shelley's "Ozymandias," Wordsworth's "Daffodils," or Byron's "She Walks in Beauty." Have them annotate the poem in whatever way they are familiar with. Then, access a reading of the poem on the internet. Have them write a short piece about the differences between reading and hearing the poem and share out with the class.	RL.9-10.1, W.9-10.9, SL.9-10.1
III	"Rime" is a poem about how a character changes, as the Mariner learns his lesson in the hardest possible way. The other character who changes, though, is the Wedding Guest. Have the students read and then reread all of the passages that mention the Wedding Guest, and map out an arc of how his character grows and changes as the story progresses. As an optional assignment, you might want to have students write a journal entry in the voice of the Wedding Guest, describing what was going through his mind as the Mariner told his tale.	RL.9-10.3, W.9-10.9
IV	While "Rime" often feels like an epic poem, especially given the geographic distance it covers, it is actually closer in form and content to the medieval ballads of England. Have students research the history of the ballad form, and have them write an essay explaining how "Rime" fits into that tradition rather than the epic.	RL.9-10.9, W.9-10.1, W.9-10.4, W.9-10.7, W.9-10.9,
V	Most people know Mary Shelley's <i>Frankenstein</i> from the numerous film adaptations of the book. However, few remember that like "Rime," <i>Frankenstein</i> has a framing structure. It begins with a series of four letters from a Captain Walton to his sister, written as Walton searches for adventure on a ship headed towards the North Pole. At the end of the second letter, Walton explicitly references Coleridge's poem, and reassures his sister that he will not wind up like the Mariner. Find the text of <i>Frankenstein</i> on the Project Gutenberg website, and have students read the introductory letters. Have students write about and then discuss the connections between the poem and the novel, and speculate why Shelley chose to quote Coleridge in her work.	RL.9-10.6, W.9-10.9, SL.9-10.1
VI	After having reviewed the basic elements and themes of English Romantic poetry, have the students write a poem in the Romantic style. Their use of language is not as important as their familiarity with the Romantic ideal. The poems may be as long or short as they are comfortable with, and, like the Romantics themselves, the students may write in a fixed form with a rhyme scheme or in free verse. As a conclusion for the activity, the teacher can collect the poems and "publish" them as <i>Lyrical Ballads II</i> .	W.9-10.3, W.9-10.9
VI.5	Once the students have written their poems, have them exchange with another student. Each student will now be responsible for "visualizing" the poem they have in their hands, as Fiona Shaw has done with "Rime." Begin by having them create a promptbook for their poem, including their ideas on how to add inflection and which words to emphasize. Then, after they have practiced their reading, have them go onto the Record-a-Poem project at <a href="http://www.soundcloud.com">www.soundcloud.com</a> and have them record their poems for the archive. Then have the students go back to their promptbooks and have them add ideas for gesture, movement, and props. Using these ideas, they will present their poems to the class, either live or on video. (Note: if you do not have students write their own poems, they may do readings and stagings of published poems).	RL.9-10.2, W.9-10.9, SL.9-10.1, SL.9-10.4, SL.9-10.5
VIII	Other artists besides Fiona Shaw have interpreted "Rime" in various ways. Have the class watch the following three clips from YouTube: Larry Jordan's 1977 film adaptation, using the brilliant illustrations by Doré and narrated by Orson Welles; the 1984 song by the metal band Iron Maiden that is named after the poem; and the 1960's recording of Richard Burton reading the poem. Have the students describe their reaction to these very different works, and discuss how and why they either add to or detract from Coleridge's poem.	RL.9-10.7, SL.9-10.1



*The Death of Socrates*, Jacques-Louis David (1787)



*Whalers*, Joseph Mallard William Turner (1841)

## “TO HIM MY TALE I TEACH”

### Selected Vocabulary from “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”

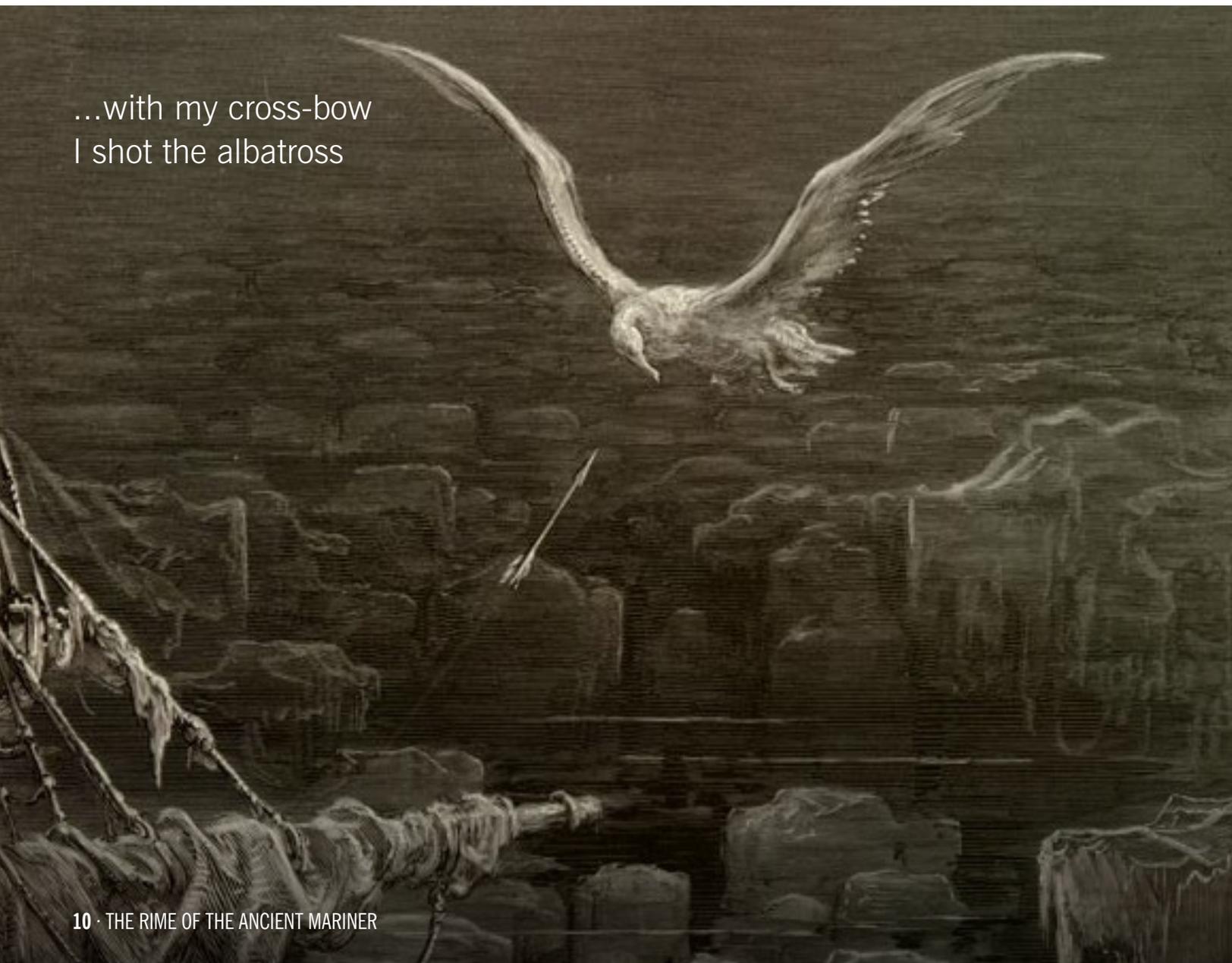
Rather than using a ready-made glossary, it might be more effective to make your students responsible for defining the words below. You might have them look up the words, or, for a bit more fun, have each student present the word using an image, a vignette they write, or even a short film that they create.

abate	kirk
abide	minstrelsy
aver	parched
cleft	prow
crimson	reek
dank	seraph
din	sere
discern	sheen
expiate	shrive
fathom (n.)	specter
gossamer	sprite
hoary	vespers

## POST-PERFORMANCE QUESTIONS

1. How did Fiona Shaw's presentation of the poem differ from the vision of the tale that you had in your mind while reading it?
2. What contributions did the presence of the dancer make to the performance? How did this affect your appreciation of the poem?
3. How did the use of such theatrical elements as sound, music, lighting, costume, props, and special effects impact the presentation of the poem?
4. How did Fiona Shaw use inflection and gesture to make her performance more powerful?
5. Now that you know a bit about Coleridge and the English Romantics, how do you think they would have reacted to Ms. Shaw's performance? Why?

...with my cross-bow  
I shot the albatross





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Rebekah Gordon: Administrative Assistant  
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## About the Writer

**Josh Cabat** is currently the Chair of English for the Roslyn (NY) Public Schools. For the preceding decade, he taught English and Film Studies at Roslyn High School in Roslyn New York. Previously, he taught in the New York City public high schools for over a dozen years. He was the co-founder of the New York City Student Shakespeare Festival, and has been awarded three fellowships by the National Endowment for the Humanities. He has been a featured speaker at many national conferences, and has published many articles on Shakespeare and Film in publications such as the English Journal. He has also conducted workshops for teachers on behalf of the Folger Shakespeare Library, and is currently the Teaching Artist for the Young Film Critics program at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. He earned an MA from the University of Chicago and a BA from Columbia University, both in English Literature.

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