

Julius Caesar

by William Shakespeare



All is glorious in Rome. Julius Caesar has made a significant, military victory and the people have requested that their savior be elected as their ruler. But Caesar refuses three times out of humility and modesty. Or is he being manipulative? These are the doubts that plague a group of envious conspirators. Fear leads to thoughts of murder, resulting in a chain of events where all parties involved—from the senators to the slaves—become pawns of their own fates.

1 Characters

Julius Caesar: A great Roman general who has recently returned to Rome after a military victory in Spain. If Caesar were to become king, it would mean the end of Rome's republican system of government, in which senators, representing the citizens of Rome, wield most of the power.

Brutus: A high-ranking, well-regarded Roman nobleman. Brutus is motivated throughout the play by his strong sense of honor.

Antony: A loyal friend of Caesar's. In contrast to the self-disciplined Brutus, he is extremely spontaneous and lives in the present moment.

Cassius: A talented general and longtime acquaintance of Caesar. He resents the fact that the Roman people have come to revere Caesar almost as a god.

Octavius: Caesar's adopted son and appointed successor.

Casca: A tribune (an official elected to represent the common people of Rome) who resents Caesar's ambition.

Calphurnia: Caesar's wife. Calphurnia invests great authority in premonitions and signs.

Portia: Brutus's wife and the daughter of a noble Roman, Cato.

Flavius and Murellus: Two tribunes who condemn the plebeians for their fickleness in cheering Caesar when once they cheered for Caesar's enemy Pompey.

Cicero: A Roman senator renowned for his oratorical skill.

Lepidus: The third member of Antony and Octavius's coalition.

Decius: A member of the conspiracy.

2 Anticipation Guide

Below are some true-false statements that address the big issues in Julius Caesar. Read each statement and determine whether it is true or false.

- T F It is sometimes acceptable to betray friends.
- T F If a political leader does something wrong, it is acceptable to get rid of him or her by any means necessary.
- T F Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.
- T F No cause, political or otherwise, is worth dying for.
- T F It is completely unacceptable to convince a close friend to do something dangerous.
- T F The more success and power a person has, the more people dislike him or her.
- T F It is better to listen to the advice of one's peers than that of one's family or spouse.
- T F In certain situations, it may be necessary for a political leader to bend or break the rules for the good of the country.
- T F Fate is more powerful than free will.
- T F Patriotism is bravery; rebellion against government is cowardly.
- T F Personal morals and principles are more important than friendship.
- T F Life without personal liberty is not worth living.

3 Background & Devices

As we read the play, consider how Shakespeare uses the following devices to create particular effects.

- allusion
- alliteration
- apostrophe
- aside
- comic relief
- foreshadowing
- foil
- hyperbole
- irony
 - dramatic
 - situational
 - verbal
- metaphor
- monologue
- oxymoron
- paradox
- personification
- pun
- simile
- soliloquy

4 Study Questions

These questions are designed to aid your reading comprehension. You may answer the questions here, in your annotations, or on a separate sheet of paper.

ACT I, SCENE I.

1. How does Shakespeare make the common people appear to be less than noble?
2. What are the people doing that angers Marullus and Flavius? Why does this anger them?
3. What actions do Marullus and Flavius take to correct the situation?

ACT I, SCENE II.

4. Why does Caesar want Calphurnia to stand in Antony's path during the race in honor of the feast of Lupercal?
5. What is Antony's response to Caesar's instructions? What does this suggest about their relationship?
6. What is Caesar's reaction to the soothsayer's warning?
7. What complaint does Cassius make about Brutus's behavior towards him? How does Brutus answer this complaint?
8. Cassius's story attacks what aspect of Caesar's makeup? What is this attack supposed to say to Brutus?
9. What does Cassius mean by the following statement? "'Brutus' will start a spirit as soon as 'Caesar.'"
10. How does Brutus respond to Cassius's attack on Caesar?
11. What astute observation does Caesar make of Cassius?
12. What faults does Caesar see in Cassius's nature?
13. What does Caesar mean by the following statement? "I rather tell thee what is to be feared/Than what I fear; for always I am Caesar."
14. What does this statement show about Caesar's nature?
15. What story does Casca relate to Brutus and Cassius? What does Casca tell us by the personal remarks he adds to the story?
16. How did the people react to Caesar's fit? What does this tell us about their feelings for Caesar?
17. What information does Casca give about Marullus and Flavius?
18. At the end of the scene, what plans does Cassius make to sway Brutus to his cause?

ACT I, SCENE III.

19. What wondrous things has Casca seen on this night?
20. What reason does Cassius give for the terrible storm?
21. What important news does Casca give Cassius about the Senate's plan?
22. What does Cassius mean by the following statement? "He were no lion, were not Romans hinds."
23. What instructions does Cassius give Cinna that will help sway Brutus to their cause?
24. What reason does Casca give for wanting Brutus to join their cause?

ACT II, SCENE I.

25. What question is Brutus pondering at the opening of the scene?
26. For what information does Brutus want Lucius to look at a calendar? What is the significance of what Lucius finds?
27. Why do the conspirators want Cicero to join them?
28. Why does Brutus reject Cicero? What is Cassius's reaction and what does this show about his and Brutus's relationship?
29. What do the conspirators plan to do the next day?
30. How does Decius say he will make sure that Caesar will come to the Capitol?
31. What has Portia done to show Brutus that she is worthy of knowing his secrets?

ACT II, SCENE II.

32. What strange and horrible things does Calphurnia report to Caesar that have been seen that night?
33. What does Calphurnia mean by the following statement? "When beggars die, there are no comets seen;/The heavens themselves blaze forth the death of princes."
34. How does Decius convince Caesar to go to the Capitol?

ACT II, SCENE III.

35. What is Artemidorus's plan?

ACT II, SCENE IV.

36. Why is Portia so nervous and upset? On what errand does she send Lucius?

ACT III, SCENE I.

37. In regard to Artemidorus's request, how does Caesar's nobility doom him?
38. What is Metellus Cimber's petition to Caesar? What is Caesar's response and why does he give this response?
39. What does Brutus instruct the conspirators to do before they go before the public? Why does he instruct them to do this?

40. What request does Antony's servant bring to Brutus? What is Brutus's response?
41. Why does Cassius object to letting Antony speak at Caesar's funeral? What reassurance does Brutus give him?
42. What promise does Antony give Brutus about his funeral speech?
43. After being left alone with Caesar's body, what does Antony promise to do?

ACT III, SCENE II.

44. What reason does Brutus give for murdering Caesar? What is the crowd's reaction?
45. What final mistake does Brutus make in letting Antony speak?
46. Why does Antony read Caesar's will to the people?
47. At the end of the scene, what are the fates of Brutus and Cassius?

ACT III, SCENE III.

48. What is the significance of this scene?

ACT IV, SCENE I.

49. What are Antony, Octavius, and Lepidus doing at the opening of the scene?
50. Why do they want Caesar's will? What is ironic about this?
51. What is Antony's plan for Lepidus? What is his reason?

ACT IV, SCENE II.

52. What does Brutus tell Lucilius about dying love?
53. What practical instructions does Brutus give Cassius about their disagreement? What is unusual about this?

ACT IV, SCENE III.

54. What wrong does Cassius say Brutus has done him?
55. In response, what does Brutus condemn Cassius for doing?
56. What does Cassius threaten to do if Brutus continues to "urge" him?
57. According to Brutus, how has Cassius wronged him? What is ironic about Brutus's accusation?
58. To prove that he has been wronged, what does Cassius tell Brutus to do to him?
59. What is the real reason for Brutus's ill temper? Give all of the details.
60. Messala brings what ill news of the triumvirate's actions in Rome?
61. What reasons does Cassius give for not going directly to Philippi?
62. What reasons does Brutus give for going directly to Philippi? Who prevails?
63. What happens to make Brutus speed up his plans to go to Philippi?

ACT V, SCENE I.

64. What hope of Octavius and Antony is answered? What does this say about Brutus?
65. What does Cassius mean by the following statement? "Flatterers! Now, Brutus, thank yourself;/This tongue had not offended so today,/If Cassius might have ruled."
66. What ominous sign has Cassius seen that causes him to fear the coming battle?
67. What does Brutus say he will do if they lose the battle? Why is he reluctant to do this?

ACT V, SCENE III.

68. What horrible mistake does Cassius make? What is the outcome of this mistake?
69. What is Titinius's reaction to Cassius's actions?
70. What is Brutus's response to Cassius's and Titinius's actions?

ACT V, SCENE IV.

71. What role does Lucilius take upon himself? What was Antony's response to his masquerade?

ACT V, SCENE V.

72. What request does Brutus make of Clitus? What is his response?
73. What does Brutus ask Volumnius to do? What reasons does he give? What is Volumnius's response?
74. What does Strato do for Brutus? What does Strato ask Brutus to do first? Why?
75. What overture of peace does Octavius make to Brutus's men?
76. How do Antony and Octavius honor Brutus?