

Julius Caesar

By: William Shakespeare

How to Read a Play

(You don't need to copy this)

- Look at the cast of characters.
- Read the description of the setting.
- Try to get a feeling for the mood of the play.
- Watch for background information that sets the stage for what is going to happen.
- Look for the conflict.
- Discover details and clues that are important.
- Watch for any evidence that reveals a change in the main character.
- Try to determine the theme.

Leading Characters in the Play

- Julius Caesar- The greatest and most powerful Roman. He was the last of a group of three men that ruled Rome. (This group was called a Triumvirate) He is assassinated by a group of conspirators who believe that Caesar is too ambitious.
- Calpurnia- The wife of Julius Caesar.
- Octavius Caesar- Caesar's Great-Nephew, heir to his Uncle's wealth and power.
- Mark Antony- Caesar's loyal friend. Antony joins Octavius and Lepidus to create a new Triumvirate.

Leading Characters in the Play

- Marcus Brutus- Caesar's great friend, he joins the conspiracy against Caesar because he loves Rome more than he loves his friend.
- Portia- Brutus' wife.
- Cassius- The conspirer and organizer of the conspiracy.
- Casca- A member of the conspiracy. Used by Shakespeare because he scoffs at ceremony and is superstitious.

Historical Background

- In the 6th C. BC, Rome was ruled by a king. He was a brutal tyrant. People fought against him and in 509 BC established Rome as a republic.
- From then Rome was governed by two consuls, who were elected. Their authority was equal, and only stayed in power for one year at a time.
- They acted on advice from the Senate, which would have originally been the King's Council. Tribunes elected from the body of citizens kept watch over the Senate to protect the rights of the common people.
- Eventually this system began to weaken, and early in the First C. BC three men-Pompey, Crassus, and Julius Caesar-united to form a Triumvirate to govern Rome and its provinces.
- Crassus was killed in battle. Civil war broke out because Caesar and Pompey would not agree to share power. In 45 BC Caesar defeated Pompey; then a little later he conquered Pompey's two sons.
- The play opens with Caesar's return from this last victory.

Historical Background

- Caesar now appeared to have absolute power, but the name 'king' was still hated and feared in Rome. Yet Caesar was popular. He was brave, successful, and generous. The Citizens loved him. But some Senators and aristocracy (upper-class) were afraid that he would become a Tyrant.
- Marcus Brutus and Cassius were nervous. They both fought against Caesar on Pompey's side, but Caesar pardoned them...

What is a Tyrant?

- In your notebook think of some modern day tyrants. Write about what it is that makes this person a tyrant.

Supernatural

- Shakespeare uses the supernatural as a way of giving information about the characters, the suspense being developed, and to entertain the crowd.
- It was often believed that when the gods were angered or when there was evil on the earth by man that there would be visible signs in nature.
- Evident in the storm scene. Some people are upset and nervous because of the storm. Cassius welcomes it, while Casca is distraught.

Supernatural

- Omens
- Signs
- Dreams (Calphurnia)
- Prophecies (The Soothsayer)
- Ghosts (Caesar)

Were commonly used to foreshadow (give clues about things to come) events in the play.

Questions, Quotes, & Vocabulary

- The questions will contain two types of questions...those that require literal comprehension of the play's action and then those that require higher-level critical thinking skills.
- The vocabulary words are grouped by scene, with line numbers given after each word.
- Quotes throughout the play will be selected for students to be aware of. Students will be asked to identify the speaker and relate the quote to the action of the play.

Act I, scene I

Vocabulary

Scene i: knave 15

concave 48

plague 55

Scene ii: hinder 30

countenance 38

cogitations 50 lamented 55

chafing 101 doublet 261

Scene iii: saucy 12

portentous 31

construe 34

1. Who are Marullus and Flavius?
2. Why were Marullus and Flavius angry with the commoners?
3. What puns or plays on words did Shakespeare make with the cobbler's lines?
4. What can you infer about the crowd from the way they are acting in this scene?
5. Who was Pompey?

1. Who is Calpurnia (Calphurnia in some texts)?
2. What does the soothsayer say to Caesar?
3. What activity takes place as part of the Lupercal?
4. What does Caesar want Calpurnia to do and why?
5. Who was Cicero?
6. How did the crowd react to Caesar refusing the crown?
7. What did Caesar do after refusing the crown the third time?
8. What will Cassius do to further convince Brutus to join the conspiracy?

I, ii (continued)

9. What are “ides”?
10. Caesar is superstitious on one hand, but chooses to ignore the warning of the soothsayer. What do you think this implies about his character?
11. How does Cassius try to turn Brutus against Caesar?
12. Why does Caesar want “fat men” around him?
13. What further information do we learn about Caesar’s character from this scene?

1. What “portentous things” did Casca report to Cicero and how did Cicero react?
2. How did Cassius interpret the unnatural phenomena?
3. What characters join the conspiracy in this scene?
4. How will Cinna help get Brutus to join the conspiracy?
5. How does the weather in this scene help build dramatic tension?
6. How does Cassius use Casca’s superstitious nature to convince him to join the conspiracy?