#### Shakespeare: *Julius Caesar* 1599

## Scenes to focus on:-

1. the opening scenes

2. the assassination

3. Caesar's spirit: III.i.270, IV.iii.273-285, V.v.17

4. the respective status of Caesar and Brutus as tragic heroes

S**tudy Questions for Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar***

1. Is Brutus an honorable man? (This is the million dollar critical question for this play. Answer better than the rest of us and get a Ph.D. and many honors!)

2. Consider Antony's funeral oration. How would you characterize him? To what or to whom is he dedicated at heart? Is he loyal to Caesar or does he have other motives?

3. How do you handle Cassius? Caesar clearly thinks he cannot be trusted, as a "lean and hungry" man--a man who looks greedy and ambitious. Does he manipulate Brutus? Or does he truly love Brutus, as he claims?

4. Notice that the common mob has a fairly large role in this play. How does Shakespeare use the crowd?

5. Notice the enormous number of symbols and signs to be interpreted--Calphurnia's dream, the portents on the night the conspiracy is made, etc. How do people read these signs? Does anybody ever understand them? Do we?

6. Consider the role of the women within the play. After reading several comedies with strong women as central characters, these women seem odd. Why are they so powerless?

Study Questions by JM Massi, Ph.D.



<http://www.jetlink.net/~massij/wssq/caesar.html>

# Julius Caesar,

Tragedy in five acts by William Shakespeare, produced in 1599-1600 and published in the First Folio of 1623 from a transcript of a promptbook.

Based on Sir Thomas North's 1579 translation (via a French version) of Plutarch's Bioi paralleloi (Parallel Lives), the drama takes place in 44 BC, after Caesar has returned to Rome. Fearing Caesar's ambition, Cassius forms a conspiracy among Roman republicans. He convinces the reluctant Brutus--Caesar's trusted friend--to join them. Brutus, troubled and sleepless, reveals his dark secret to his wife, Portia. Then, as planned, Caesar is slain in the Senate on March 15, "the ides of March." His friend Mark Antony, who has expediently accepted the bloodied hands of the conspirators, gives a stirring funeral oration that inspires the crowd to turn against them.

Octavius, Caesar's nephew, forms a triumvirate with Antony and Lepidus; Brutus and Cassius are eventually defeated at the Battle of Philippi, where they kill themselves to avoid further dishonour.

The play has been called the tragedy of Brutus, an honourable man caught up in a fate he cannot understand. Shakespeare examines the nature of rebellion and political power and employs dramatic irony to great effect.

The figure of Julius Caesar held particular fascination for the Elizabethans. He was a soldier, scholar, and politician (Francis Bacon held him in special regard for the universality of his genius); he had been killed by his greatest friend (Shakespeare alluded to the "bastard hand" of Brutus in Henry VI, Part 2); and he was seen as the first Roman to perceive and, in part, to achieve the benefits of a monarchical state.

Shakespeare's Caesar appears in just three scenes and is murdered before the play is half finished, though several characters respond to and reflect upon the central fact of the great man. This is the dramatic strategy of an ironist, or of a writer who wishes to question human behaviour and to observe interactions and consequences. In fact, Caesar influences the whole play, for he appears after his death as a bloodstained corpse and as a ghost before battle. Both Brutus and Cassius die conscious of Caesar and even speak to him as if he were present. And then his heir takes command, to "part the glories" of what is for him a "happy day."

In other ways Julius Caesar is shaped differently from the histories and tragedies that precede it, as if in manner as in subject matter Shakespeare was making decisive changes. The scene moves only from Rome to the battlefield, and with this new setting language becomes more restrained, firmer, and sharper. Extensive descriptive images are few, and single words such as "Roman," "honour," "love," "friend," and proper names are repeated as if to enforce contrasts and ironies. In performance this sharp verbal edge--linked with commanding performances and the various excitements of debate, conspiracy, private crises, political eloquence, mob violence, supernatural portents, personal antagonisms, battle, and deaths--holds attention. The play continues to have popular appeal and to fascinate.

## *Encyclopaedia Britannica: Shakespeare and the Globe: Then and Now*

<http://shakespeare.eb.com/shakespeare/micro/729/78.html>

# Factual background

Sources for the life of Caesar include biographies by Suetonius and Plutarch. The latter, in a translation written by Thomas North entitled Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans, was Shakespeare's source. In June of 1599 the Privy Council had issued an order forbidding the production of English History plays, some of which had been a source of political embarrassment. The Globe Theatre had opened in the early autumn of the same year and Shakespeare's new Roman history play was one of the first to be performed on the new stage.

Julius Caesar (100?-44 B.C.) was a Roman statesman and general. He made Gaul a Roman province and prepared the way for the establishment of the Roman Empire. Caesar was a man of vision and versatility. Caesar wrote commentaries on the Gallic and Civil Wars. As an orator he was excelled only by Cicero. Caesar was born into a patrician family. In 84 he married Cornelia, daughter of an enemy of the dictator Sulla. Deprived of property and rank for refusing to divorce his wife, Caesar fled Rome. He served in military campaigns in Asia and returned to Rome in 78 following Sulla's death. In Rome he plunged into politics and won favour with the populace, who elected him pontifex maximus in 63.

Following a period of valuable military experience as propraetor in Spain, he returned to Rome in 60. The Senate, influenced by Cato the Younger, refused Caesar's request to stand for the consulate, where upon Caesar refused the triumph granted to victorious generals and joined with the great general Pompey and the wealthy Crassus in the First Triumvirate. Caesar secured the consulate in 59. He was granted the governorship of Cisalpine Gaul (northern Italy), Illyricum, and Transalpine Gaul (the huge territory bounded by the Mediterranean, the Pyrenees, the ocean, the Rhine River, and the Alps). The German tribes in Transalpine Gaul were on the verge of seeking mastery of the territory, and for nine years Caesar was occupied with subduing them. He also conducted inconclusive campaigns in Britain in 55 and 54. His defeat of Vercingetorix settled the fate of Gaul, which became an orderly province by 51.

In 54, however, Julia, daughter of Caesar and wife of Pompey, died. Crassus was killed in 53. In league with the Senate, Pompey worked to undermine Caesar's power. In 49 Caesar, with one legion, crossed the Rubicon, a river on the northern boundary of Italy proper. Pompey fled to the East, where he was renowned, and Caesar overran all of Italy. After subduing Pompey's lieutenants in Spain, Caesar sailed to meet Pompey. On the plain of Thessaly his hardened veterans defeated decisively Pompey's larger army. Pompey fled to Egypt, where he was murdered.

In Egypt Caesar became involved in the Alexandrine War, which he successfully resolved in favour of Cleopatra. In 47 Caesar defeated Pharnaces II at Zile in Asia Minor and sent to Rome his succinct report, "Veni ,vidi, vici" (I came, I saw, I conquered). In 46 Caesar crushed the Pompeian forces that had united under Scipio in Africa. In Rome, in 46, Caesar celebrated his great triumphs and won the people with festivals, gifts, and games. In the same year he fought Pompey's sons, whom he defeated in Spain in one of his most difficult battles.

Against all Roman tradition, Caesar was made dictator for life in 44. His head appeared on Roman coins of 45 and 44, and he aspired to a monarchy. Because of public disapproval Caesar reluctantly refused the crown placed on his head by Mark Antony in February, 44. On March 15, 44, Caesar fell beneath the knives of conspirators led by Marcus Brutus and Gaius Cassius. Caesar's new government had threatened the old republican institutions. For this reason Julius Caesar was assassinated by the senatorial aristocracy.

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<http://www.entrenet.com/~groedmed/jc.html>

# List of Characters

**Julius Caesar**: the titular character. When the play starts, he is the only man capable of giving orders and ensuring they are carried out. Caesar fails to understand the many signs indicating a plot against him and is killed by a conspiracy led by Cassius and Brutus. His ghost haunts the remainder of the play, and his name is invoked by both Cassius and Brutus before they commit suicide in the final act.

**Calpurnia**: the wife of Caesar. She has a dream in which she sees a statue of Caesar bleeding from multiple wounds, and begs him to stay at home the day he is killed. Caesar ignores her and goes to the Senate House anyway.

**Marcus Brutus**: a noble Roman opposed to Caesar. He is an idealist who upholds honor above everything else. Brutus only agrees to kill Caesar after becoming convinced that it is necessary for the Roman Republic. He dies on the battlefield by impaling himself on his own sword.

**Portia**: the wife of Brutus. She proves her courage and strength by stabbing her thigh with a dagger in order to force Brutus to tell her about the plot to kill Caesar. She kills herself by swallowing hot coals from the fire after Mark Antony and Octavius assume power in Rome.

**Lucius**: a servant to Brutus.

**Caius Cassius**: a man opposed to Caesar. He assembles the conspirators and is the man who convinces Brutus to kill Caesar. He commits suicide at the battle of Philippi after falsely thinking his army has been defeated.

**Casca**: a man opposed to Caesar.

**Trebonius**: a man opposed to Caesar.

**Decius Brutus**: a man opposed to Caesar. He misinterprets Calpurnia's dream in order to convince Caesar to go to the Senate House on the ides of March.

**Metellus Cimber**: a man opposed to Caesar.

**Cinna**: a man opposed to Caesar.

**Caius Ligarius**: a man opposed to Caesar.

**Mark Antony**: a ruler of Rome after Caesar's death. Antony is Caesar's friend from the beginning and he gives a rousing speech to the masses which causes riots in Rome. Brutus and Cassius are chased out of the city in the ensuing chaos, and Antony forms the second triumvirate with Octavius and Lepidus.

**Octavius Caesar**: a ruler of Rome after Caesar's death. Octavius is a young general who joins the second triumvirate. He and Antony fight against Brutus and Cassius; he historically becomes the future emperor of Rome.

**Lepidus**: a ruler of Rome after Caesar's death.

**Flavius**: a tribune of the people. He is removed from office after derobing the statues of Caesar.

**Murellus**: a tribune of the people. He is removed from office after derobing the statues of Caesar.

**Cicero**: a senator. He tells Casca that men construe omens the way they want to. He is later killed by Antony and Octavius when they purge the Senate.

**Publius**: a senator.

**Popillius Laena**: a senator.

**A Soothsayer**: a man who tells Caesar to beware the ides of March (March 15) but who is ignored.

**Artemidorus**: a man who tries to give Caesar a letter in which he describes the plot against him. Caesar ignores his letter.

**Cinna the Poet**: a poet who is beaten and possibly killed because he has the same name as one of the conspirators.

**Pindarus**: the bondsman to Cassius.

**Titinius**: an officer in Cassius' army. He kills himself when he finds Cassius dead on the battlefield.

**Lucillius, Messala, Varrus, Claudio, Young Cato, Strato, Volumnius, Flavius, Dardanius, Clitus**: officers and soldiers in Brutus' army.

**A Poet**: a man who bursts into Brutus' tent and tries to warn the army that Brutus and Cassius are angry with each other. Brutus orders him to be taken away.

**The Ghost of Caesar**:a ghost of Julius Caesar who speaks to Brutus at Sardis.

A Cobbler

A Carpenter

A Messenger

Plebeians

**Servants, senators, soldiers, and attendants**

**The theme of (unchecked) ambition**

1. Read the extract below from the end of Act 1 Scene 1

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| MARULLUS | May we do so? |  |
|  | You know it is the feast of Lupercal. |  |
| FLAVIUS | It is no matter; let no images |  |
|  | Be hung with Caesar's trophies. I'll about, | 70 |
|  | And drive away the vulgar from the streets: |  |
|  | So do you too, where you perceive them thick. |  |
|  | These growing feathers pluck'd from Caesar's wing |  |
|  | Will make him fly an ordinary pitch, |  |
|  | Who else would soar above the view of men |  |
|  | And keep us all in servile fearfulness. | **allusion**  /əˈluːʒ(ə)n/  Noun  M. H. **Abrams** defines **allusion** as “a reference, explicit or indirect, to a person, place, or event, or to another **literary** work or passage.”9 |
|  | *Exeunt* |  |

2. a) Then read the story of Icarus below and look at the pictures.

b) What do you think is the moral of the story of Icarus?

3. a) Now return to the speech from *Julius Caesar* Act 1 Scene 1.

b) Identify the **allusion** in the passage.

c) Explain the connection between Icarus and Julius Caesar.

## The legend

[*The Lament for Icarus*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Lament_for_Icarus) (1898) by [H. J. Draper](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herbert_James_Draper)

Icarus's father [Daedalus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daedalus), a very talented and remarkable [Athenian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Athens) craftsman, built the [Labyrinth](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cretan_Labyrinth) for [King Minos](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minos) of Crete near his palace at [Knossos](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Knossos) to imprison the [Minotaur](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minotaur), a half-man, half-bull monster born of his wife and the [Cretan bull](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cretan_bull). Minos imprisoned Daedalus himself in the labyrinth because he gave Minos's daughter, [Ariadne](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ariadne), a [clew](https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/clew)[[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Icarus#cite_note-2) (or ball of string) in order to help [Theseus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theseus), the enemy of Minos, to survive the Labyrinth and defeat the Minotaur.

Daedalus fashioned two pairs of wings out of wax and feathers for himself and his son. Daedalus tried his wings first, but before trying to escape the island, he warned his son not to fly too close to the sun, nor too close to the sea, but to follow his path of flight. Overcome by the giddiness that flying lent him, Icarus soared into the sky, but in the process, he came too close to the sun, which due to the [heat](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heat) melted the wax. Icarus kept flapping his wings but soon realized that he had no feathers left and that he was only flapping his bare arms, and so Icarus fell into the sea and drowned in the area which today bears his name, the [Icarian Sea](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Icarian_Sea) near [Icaria](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Icaria), an island southwest of [Samos](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samos).[[3]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Icarus#cite_note-3)[[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Icarus#cite_note-4)[[5]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Icarus#cite_note-5)



Critical responses to the play

#### (sourced from Jstor [www.jstor.org](http://www.jstor.org) )

“The complexity of *Julius Caesar*” – Mildred Hartsock (1966)

Hartsock outlines that there is little agreement about elementary questions regarding the play.

* “Is Caesar an egocentric, dangerous dictator – a genuine threat to Rome or is he the ‘noblest man / that ever lived in the tide of times’?” (Antony).
* “Is Brutus the mistaken idealist, strong in abstract principle but weak in human perspective? Or the Aristotelian hero, noble but flawed, recognizing at last he has erred of is he the willful egoist?”
* “Is Cassius the dedicated republican or is he the ‘lean and hungry’ envious one who hates Caesar for personal reasons?”

Her response to these questions is that “there is no one truth in the play, no possibility of a single, unifying approach.

She considers the audience’s response to the complexities of the play and how the Roman mob deals with the same complexities:

Like the groundlings and like the Roman mob, we clap and hiss Brutus, then Caesar; Cassius, then Antony; then the mob itself. We sway with oratory; we respond to the beauty and power of individual passages; we make some arbitrary empathic identification. And we are brought to realize that the truth is what one decides it is. History is a “construct” and only poets can be believed.

Her final thoughts are about production and about the importance of the play’s complexities:

“A director has the obligation to present the play with all its contradictions intact.”

“Critic and director alike must resist over-simplified resolutions when the very heart of the play is its irresolvable paradoxes.”

Shakespeare: Three Roman Plays

# Welcome to the Quotations from *Julius Caesar* Quiz

1. Identify the speaker:

Into what dangers would you lead me, Cassius,

That you would have me seek into myself

For that which is not in me?

a) Brutus

b) Caesar

c) Flavius

d) Marullus

2. Identify the speaker:

Are not you moved, when all the sway of earth

Shakes like a thing unfirm? O Cicero,

I have seen tempests, when the scolding winds

Have rived the knotty oaks, and I have seen

The ambitious ocean swell and rage and foam,

To be exalted with the threatening clouds:

But never till to-night, never till now,

Did I go through a tempest dropping fire.

Either there is a civil strife in heaven,

Or else the world, too saucy with the gods,

Incenses them to send destruction.

a) Brutus

b) Caesar

c) Casca

d) Lucius

3. Identify the speaker:

Caesar, I never stood on ceremonies,

Yet now they fright me. There is one within,

Besides the things that we have heard and seen,

Recounts most horrid sights seen by the watch.

A lioness hath whelped in the streets;

And graves have yawn'd, and yielded up their dead;

Fierce fiery warriors fought upon the clouds,

In ranks and squadrons and right form of war,

Which drizzled blood upon the Capitol;

The noise of battle hurtled in the air,

Horses did neigh, and dying men did groan,

And ghosts did shriek and squeal about the streets.

O Caesar! these things are beyond all use,

And I do fear them.

a) Calpurnia

b) Cicero

c) Portia

d) Soothsayer

4. Identify the speaker:

I could be well moved, if I were as you:

If I could pray to move, prayers would move me:

But I am constant as the northern star,

Of whose true-fix'd and resting quality

There is no fellow in the firmament.

The skies are painted with unnumber'd sparks,

They are all fire and every one doth shine,

But there's but one in all doth hold his place:

So in the world; 'tis furnish'd well with men,

And men are flesh and blood, and apprehensive;

Yet in the number I do know but one

That unassailable holds on his rank,

Unshaked of motion: and that I am he,

Let me a little show it, even in this;

That I was constant Cimber should be banish'd,

And constant do remain to keep him so.

a) Anthony

b) Artemidorus

c) Caesar

d) Marullus

5. Identify the speaker:

O mighty Caesar! dost thou lie so low?

Are all thy conquests, glories, triumphs, spoils,

Shrunk to this little measure? Fare thee well.

I know not, gentlemen, what you intend,

Who else must be let blood, who else is rank:

If I myself, there is no hour so fit

As Caesar's death hour, nor no instrument

Of half that worth as those your swords, made rich

With the most noble blood of all this world.

I do beseech ye, if you bear me hard,

Now, whilst your purpled hands do reek and smoke,

Fulfil your pleasure. Live a thousand years,

I shall not find myself so apt to die:

No place will please me so, no mean of death,

As here by Caesar, and by you cut off,

The choice and master spirits of this age.

a) Anthony

b) Artemidorus

c) Caesar

d) Marullus

6. Identify the speaker:

Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears;

I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him.

The evil that men do lives after them;

The good is oft interred with their bones;

So let it be with Caesar. The noble Brutus

Hath told you Caesar was ambitious:

If it were so, it was a grievous fault,

And grievously hath Caesar answer'd it.

Here, under leave of Brutus and the rest--

For Brutus is an honourable man;

So are they all, all honourable men--

Come I to speak in Caesar's funeral.

He was my friend, faithful and just to me:

But Brutus says he was ambitious;

And Brutus is an honourable man.

He hath brought many captives home to Rome

Whose ransoms did the general coffers fill:

Did this in Caesar seem ambitious?

When that the poor have cried, Caesar hath wept:

Ambition should be made of sterner stuff:

Yet Brutus says he was ambitious;

And Brutus is an honourable man.

You all did see that on the Lupercal

I thrice presented him a kingly crown,

Which he did thrice refuse: was this ambition?

Yet Brutus says he was ambitious;

And, sure, he is an honourable man.

I speak not to disprove what Brutus spoke,

But here I am to speak what I do know.

You all did love him once, not without cause:

What cause withholds you then, to mourn for him?

O judgment! thou art fled to brutish beasts,

And men have lost their reason. Bear with me;

My heart is in the coffin there with Caesar,

And I must pause till it come back to me.

a) Anthony

b) Artemidorus

c) Calpurnia

d) Portia

7. Identify the speaker:

I dreamt to-night that I did feast with Caesar,

And things unlucky charge my fantasy:

I have no will to wander forth of doors,

Yet something leads me forth.

a) Anthony

b) Brutus

c) Calpurnuia

d) Cinna (the Poet)

8. Identify the speaker:

. . . Hated by one he loves; braved by his brother;

Cheque'd like a bondman; all his faults observed,

Set in a note-book, learn'd, and conn'd by rote,

To cast into my teeth. O, I could weep

My spirit from mine eyes! There is my dagger,

And here my naked breast; within, a heart

Dearer than Plutus' mine, richer than gold:

If that thou be'st a Roman, take it forth;

I, that denied thee gold, will give my heart:

Strike, as thou didst at Caesar; for, I know,

When thou didst hate him worst, thou lovedst him better . . .

a) Brutus

b) Caesar

c) Calpurnuia

d) Cassius

9. Identify the speaker:

Now is that noble vessel full of grief,

That it runs over even at his eyes.

a) Brutus

b) Cinna

c) Clitus

d) Pindarus

10. Identify the speaker:

This was the noblest Roman of them all:

All the conspirators save only he

Did that they did in envy of great Caesar;

He only, in a general honest thought

And common good to all, made one of them.

His life was gentle, and the elements

So mix'd in him that Nature might stand up

And say to all the world 'This was a man!'

a) Anthony

b) Brutus

c) Caesar

d) Cassius