

William Shakespeare's
Julius Caesar

Study Guide

Setting

Ancient Rome 44 B.C.

The play takes place before Rome developed into an empire. Julius Caesar has just defeated Pompey after a long civil war. He returns to Rome triumphantly and is in a position to take power. Some people are concerned because dictators have taken power before.

Characters

Julius Caesar

Although Caesar was one of the strongest individuals in history, Shakespeare presents him with a number of weaknesses. In spite of all of these weaknesses, it is the spirit of Caesar that pervades the whole play. At the end of the play, Brutus says, "Caesar, thou art mighty yet."

Brutus

Brutus is the epitome of all that is gentle and good in man. His sterner qualities make him admirable; his gentler qualities make him lovable. He is one of the finest characters in all of Shakespeare's writing. Had Brutus been less idealistic and less merciful, he no doubt would have been successful in crushing the powerful forces of Caesar. His three mistakes cost him his life, but Brutus feels no enmity, even in death.

Cassius

If ever Shakespeare presented characters in contrast, he does it in molding the conspiracy around Cassius and Brutus. Cassius is the realist, the shrewd contriver, the ambitious one. He is the clever psychologist who knows just how to manipulate Brutus' thoughts and how to bring him into the conspiracy. Cassius is a strong leader, but he has one weakness—his admiration for Brutus. That admiration overrules his better judgment and culminates in his downfall. Without Brutus in the play, Cassius would have emerged as a much stronger leader.

Marc Antony

At the time of Caesar's assassination, Antony was thirty-seven years old. Never taking life very seriously, he led a pleasure-loving existence. Because he was reckless, careless, and handsome, the people loved him. Antony proves himself to be clever when he addresses the crowd after Caesar's murder and convinces them that Caesar was not ambitious.

Octavius

Octavius was nineteen when Caesar was assassinated and only twenty-one when he and Antony defeated the conspirators at Philippi. Eleven years later, he sent Antony and Cleopatra to defeat and death. Shakespeare wrote about that subject in his play *Antony and Cleopatra*. Octavius ruled Rome for forty-one years (until 17 A.D.). He was called the august, the grand, the magnificent (Augustus).

See list of characters for minor characters and their roles

Study Guide Questions

Directions: After reading each act out loud in class, the following questions will be discussed/answered in small groups in class. Each student must write the answers to the following questions in complete sentences on a separate sheet of paper. All answers should be numbered and headed with the proper act and scene numbers! Most responses will require several sentences in order to be answered completely. *Be sure to rephrase the question in your answer!!*

Act I, Scene 1

1. What is the situation at the beginning of the play?
2. Identify Flavius and Marullus. What are they doing?
3. What is Lupercal?

Act I, Scene 2

4. What warning is given to Caesar? By whom? How does he react?
5. What are the two incidents Cassius tells to Brutus? What is his purpose in telling them?
6. What kind of person does Brutus seem to be? Cassius?
7. What is Caesar's opinion of Antony? of Cassius?
8. What is the report given by Casca?
9. How does Cassius feel about his talk with Brutus?

Act I, Scene 3

10. What is the effect of the storm? It's purpose?
11. How does Cassius say he can escape tyranny?
12. What is the next step in convincing Brutus?

Act II, Scene 1

1. Explain Brutus' speech that begins: "It must be by his death..."
2. Why do the conspirators want Cicero and then leave him out?
3. Why won't Brutus take an oath?
4. Why does he oppose the assassination of Antony?
5. How has Caesar changed?
6. What are some of Portia's characteristics?

Act II, Scene 2

7. Describe the night.
8. What has Caesar decided to do when Decius comes? What reason does he give?
9. Why does he change his mind?
10. What are the two interpretations of the dream?

Act III, Scene 1

1. What was each of the following characters to do at the capitol: Trebonious, Cimber, Casca, Brutus?
2. How do the conspirators react to the assassination?
3. How can you prove the dream was fulfilled?
4. What prophecy is made?
5. What message does Antony's servant bring?
6. What does Antony ask of the conspirators if they plan to kill him?
7. Of what do they assure him?

8. Who doubts the wisdom of answering Antony's request?
9. Summarize Antony's soliloquy.

Act III, Scene 2

10. How does Brutus justify Caesar's murder when he speaks to the people?
11. How is the point proven to the people?
12. How does Antony arouse the people to mutiny?
13. How does Antony show he understands the people better than Brutus?
14. What three examples does Antony give to prove that Caesar was not ambitious?
15. What are the provisions of Caesar's will?
16. Who is prepared to take control of the government of Rome now?

Act IV, Scene 1

1. What is the Second Triumvirate? Who composes it?
2. What is the new triumvirate planning to do?

Act IV, Scene 2

3. Where are Brutus and Cassius?

Act IV, Scene 3

4. Who quarrels? Why?
5. What does Brutus think of himself?
6. Why does Cassius say he is weary of the world?
7. What alibi does Cassius use?
8. What news do we hear of Portia? What is Brutus' reaction?
9. Give the arguments pro and con for marching to Philippi. Why does Cassius think the army should be held at Sardis? Why does Brutus think they should march?
10. Why does Caesar's ghost appear to Brutus? What does it say to Brutus?

Act V, Scene 1

1. Where does the scene take place?
2. What do Brutus and Cassius do?

Act V, Scene 3

3. How does Cassius die?
4. How does Pindarus earn his freedom?
5. What happens to Titinius?

Act V, Scene 4

6. How does Brutus die?
7. What do Antony and Octavius say about Brutus?
8. Who wins and becomes ruler of Rome?

Homework Questions

Directions: The following questions will be assigned for homework after each act has been read in class and discussed in study groups. Each question will require at least three complete sentences. Write the answers on a separate sheet of paper. Make sure you head your loose leaf paper with the proper act number.

Act I

1. In scene 3 Cassius says of Caesar: "I know he would not be a wolf/But that he sees the Romans are but sheep." Explain what he means.
2. Scene 3 describes many strange happenings in Rome. Why are such events appropriate to the action of the play at this moment?
3. What kind of person is Casca?

Act II

1. What are Brutus' reasons for deciding that it is right to assassinate Caesar?
2. What picture does Shakespeare give us of Brutus' marriage?
3. What does Caesar's habit of referring to himself in the third person tell us about him? (For example, he says, "Shall Caesar send a lie?")
4. What evidence is there in this act that shows both Caesar and Brutus can be influenced by flattery?

Act III

1. Explain how Antony is able to work the crowd up into a frenzy with his speech?
2. What impression does Shakespeare give of the crowd's character in this act?

Act IV

1. How does Brutus react to Portia's death? What do we learn about him from his reaction?

Act V

1. What is said and done in Act V that supports the comment: Brutus' and Cassius' defeat is revenge for Caesar's murder?

Review of Chronology

Directions: Number the following incidents in the order in which they occurred.

Act I

- _____ Caesar disregards the Soothsayer's warning to beware the Ides of March.
- _____ Casca enters Cassius' conspiracy on the night before the Ides of March.
- _____ Caesar returns to Rome after defeating Pompey.
- _____ Cassius, now certain that Brutus can be won over, prepares to meet with the conspiracy.
- _____ The first domestic opposition to Caesar is evident in the speeches and action of the two Tribunes, Flavius and Marullus.
- _____ The opposition to Caesar becomes more apparent as Cassius attempts to win Brutus' allegiance.
- _____ Brutus reveals his private fears that Caesar will accept the crown.
- _____ Cinna is sent to place forged notes in praise of Brutus.
- _____ Casca brings his account of Caesar's three refusals to accept the crown from Mark Antony.

Act II

- _____ Calpurnia tells Caesar of the disturbing dreams she has had.
- _____ The conspirators meet at Brutus' home and Brutus finally agrees to join their ranks.
- _____ Artemidorous writes Caesar a warning.
- _____ Portia, Brutus's wife, demands to know what is going on. Brutus assures her he will explain everything later.
- _____ Brutus stands alone and tries to find a reason for Caesar's death. He can find none.
- _____ Decius arrives and convinces Caesar that Calpurnia's dream is a good omen.
- _____ Portia meets the soothsayer and is told that Caesar is in danger. She fears for Brutus' safety and anxiously awaits his return.
- _____ Brutus cautions against killing Antony. This is the first of many mistakes that will lead to his downfall.

Act III

- _____ Caesar is killed by the conspirators.
- _____ Antony carries the dead body of Caesar to the forum.
- _____ Brutus leaves the pulpit reminding the crowd that Antony speaks with the blessing of the conspirators. He asks them to kindly give Antony their attention.
- _____ Initially confusing Cinna the poet with Cinna the conspirator, the crowd attacks the poet for composing bad verses and carries him away.
- _____ Publius yells at Artemidorous as he tries to give Caesar a letter of warning.
- _____ Using every trick known to orators, Antony whips the crowd into a frenzy.
- _____ The crowd travels to the houses of the conspirators to burn them down.
- _____ Brutus explains to Antony that the motives of the conspirators are difficult to understand, but for the best.

Act IV

- _____ In Rome, the second triumvirate of Antony, Octavius, and Lepidus prepares to crush all opposition and to advance on the forces of Brutus and Cassius.
- _____ Brutus, angered by Cassius' failure to send him money for his troops, accuses his partner of graft.
- _____ Cassius, stunned by the accusation, is reconciled to Brutus only after a lengthy argument.
- _____ Cassius agrees with Brutus' battle plan against his better judgment, and the conspirators march to Philippi.
- _____ Brutus informs Cassius that Portia, grieving over the strong opposition to her husband, has killed herself.
- _____ The ghost of Caesar appears to Brutus and informs him that they shall meet at Philippi.

Act V

- _____ Brutus and Cassius meet during the battle of Philippi and discuss its outcome. Suicide comes to their mind even though Brutus is a stoic.
- _____ Noting a weakness in Octavius' ranks, Brutus sends a message to Cassius that he should have his men attack the forces of Antony.
- _____ From a hilltop, Cassius and his slave Pindarus see a group of horsemen approaching. Titinius is sent to discover whether they are friend or foe. He is surrounded and apparently taken by the enemy.
- _____ Cassius orders his slave, Pindarus, to kill him in exchange for his own freedom.
- _____ When Titinius and Brutus' men enter to give Cassius the victory wreath, they find him dead, the victim of a mistaken conclusion. The grief stricken Titinius places the wreath on the corpse and kills himself. Brutus enters, finds the two men dead, and mournfully orders the battle continued.
- _____ Brutus realizes that defeat is inevitable. He begs his associates to kill him, but they refuse.
- _____ Strato, Brutus' slave, holds the sword, and Brutus runs upon it. His last thought is that Caesar is avenged.
- _____ Octavius and Antony arrive, and Antony praises Brutus as "the noblest Roman of them all."

Vocabulary

Directions: Rewrite each word on a separate sheet of paper, then write down the dictionary definition. Then explain how the word is used in the play.

Act I

servile
barren
countenance
torrent
infirmity
blunt
portentous

Act II

taper
spurn
base
augmented
redress
insurrection
visage
affability
imminent
constancy

Act III

firmament
apprehensive
valiant
beseech
malice
plebeians
censure
legacy
orator

Act IV

chastisement
choleric
repose
apparition
rash
nimbleness
contaminate
bait
covetous

Act V

cur
misconduct
bestow
legions
vile
disconsolate
entrails
bondage
tarry

Directions: Use your best EDUCATED guess to complete the following “mini-quizzes.” You may write your answers on this page.

Archaic Words

- | | | |
|-----------|-----------------------|--|
| 1. _____ | ague | a. pray thee (beg thee) |
| 2. _____ | alarum | b. a call to arms, such as a trumpet sound |
| 3. _____ | an | c. hurry |
| 4. _____ | betimes | d. here, where, there |
| 5. _____ | fleering | e. if |
| 6. _____ | hence, whence, thence | f. servant, or person of humble birth |
| 7. _____ | hie | g. more; referred to number and amounts |
| 8. _____ | knave | h. flattering |
| 9. _____ | Marry! | I. a small amount |
| 10. _____ | moe | j. fever |
| 11. _____ | prithe | k. a mild oath, shortened from “By the Virgin Mary!” |
| 12. _____ | smatch | l. from time to time |

Words with Different Meanings

- | | | |
|-----------|---------------|--|
| 13. _____ | closet | a. ghostly |
| 14. _____ | exhalations | b. noble |
| 15. _____ | gentle | c. slowly, or “wait a minute” |
| 16. _____ | ghastly | d. true |
| 17. _____ | humor | e. presumptuous |
| 18. _____ | indifferently | f. wholly, entirely |
| 19. _____ | just | g. a small room, often a private study |
| 20. _____ | merely | h. serious |
| 21. _____ | repair | i. impartially |
| 22. _____ | sad | j. intelligence |
| 23. _____ | saucy | k. meteors |
| 24. _____ | soft | l. go |
| 25. _____ | wit | m. temper or disposition |