



Oregon
Shakespeare
Festival.

2017 Study Guide



Julius Caesar coin 44 BC

Julius Caesar

by William Shakespeare

The Roman Republic

- Republic can be defined as a system of government in which the power rests with the citizens who are entitled to vote and is carried out by representatives chosen directly or indirectly by them.
- Rome was once a monarchy, ruled by kings. After the kings were ousted, Romans installed a representative, elected government.
- The government was headed by two **consuls** who were elected by the citizens and advised by the Senate.
- The **Senate** was made up of appointed figures from the aristocracy.
- The voting population was divided into two unequal classes, the **patricians** (upper-class landowners who held high government positions) and **plebeians** (commoners who could vote but not hold a position of power).
- A dictator could be elected in the case of civic emergency. Once the emergency had passed, power went back to the Senate.



Roman sculpture of Julius Caesar

HISTORICAL FIGURE

- **Born:** Gaius Julius Caesar July 13, 100 BC.
- **Died:** Assassinated in 44 BC by a group of senators.
- **Accomplishments and Contributions:** Adopted Julian Calendar/ General in Roman Army. Acquired new lands for Rome. Conducted first invasion of Britain. Was named dictator in perpetuity and ruled as such from January 26 or February 15 of the year 44 BC until his death on March 15.



William Shakespeare

SHAKESPEARE'S PLAY

- Written in 1599.
- Condensed retelling of historical events.
- Influenced by Plutarch's accounts of Julius Caesar.
- Rebellion in ancient Rome resonated with political turmoil in England nearing the end of the reign of Queen Elizabeth.
- Universal themes of power, ambition, honor and loyalty.
- Even though the play is titled *Julius Caesar*, he only appears alive in three scenes.

Before seeing/reading the play

1. Research the history behind the people, story and events in the play. Who was Julius Caesar? What happened to Julius Caesar before the events of play? Who was Pompey? Who was Mark Antony? Who was Octavius Caesar? These and other websites provide information:

<http://www.biography.com/people/julius-caesar-9192504#assassination>

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Augustus-Roman-emperor>

<http://www.history.com/topics/ancient-history/mark-antony>

2. What is a plebeian? How much power did a plebeian hold in a republic? In a monarchy? In what way can plebeians become powerful in a government? In modern society, who would be classified as plebeian? These and other websites provide information:

https://www.ducksters.com/history/ancient_rome/plebeians_and_patricians.php

**“When Caesar says,
‘Do this,’ it is performed.”**

3. Define ambition. What are the positive aspects of ambition? What are the negative aspects? When might ambition be dangerous?

4. Define honor. What role did the concept of honor play in ancient Rome? How does one gain or lose honor in Roman society? How does the attainment of honor or dishonor reflect one’s status as an individual in society? How does a personal sense of honor differ from a public sense of honor? These and other websites provide information:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dignitas_\(Roman_concept\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dignitas_(Roman_concept))

<https://www.encyclopedia.com/philosophy-and-religion/other-religious-beliefs-and-general-terms/miscellaneous-religion/honor>

5. Define tragic flaw also known as hamartia. What type of characters does it traditionally relate to? What are the results of the tragic flaw? What do the resulting actions bring about in the audience? These and other websites provide information:

<https://www.britannica.com/art/hamartia>

<https://literarydevices.net/tragic-flaw/>

6. What is a political conspiracy? What is needed for a political conspiracy to work? What are some examples of political conspiracies in history? This and other websites provide information:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_political_conspiracies

7. Research suicide in ancient Rome and in warrior culture. These and other websites provide information:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Forced_suicide#In_ancient_Greece_and_Rome

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_suicide#Military_suicide

8. What and when is the Ides of March? What is a soothsayer? What is the Feast of Lupercal, or Lupercalia? These and other websites provide information:

<http://www.infoplease.com/spot/ides1.html>

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Lupercalia>



2017 *Julius Caesar* costume renderings for Ensemble by Raquel Barreto.

9. Research rhetoric in *Julius Caesar*. When is it used? Why is it used? This and other websites provide information:

<https://www.bl.uk/shakespeare/articles/rhetoric-power-and-persuasion-in-julius-caesar>

10. *Julius Caesar* was written in 1599, toward the end of Queen Elizabeth’s reign in England. What was occurring politically in England in the late 1500s? This and other websites provide information:

<http://www.sparknotes.com/biography/elizabeth/section10.rhtml>

Learn more about Shakespeare’s life and times at the following websites:

http://www.absoluteshakespeare.com/trivia/biography/shakespeare_biography.htm

<https://www.bardweb.net/bio.html>

<https://www.folger.edu/shakespeares-life>

After seeing/reading the play

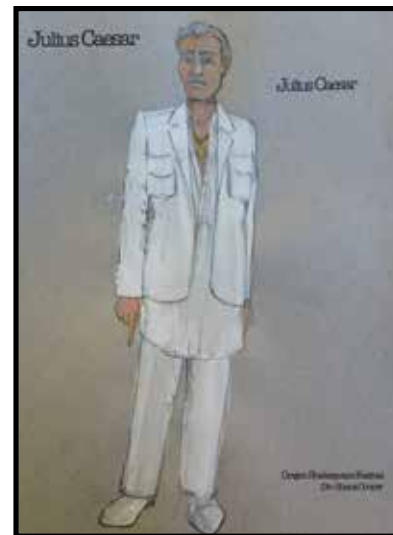
1. Who has the most power at the beginning of the play? What is the source of this power? When does power shift? Who does it shift to? How do these shifts of power occur? Who has the most power by the end of the play? What is the source of this power?
2. Refer to your research on honor and ambition. How can honor and a dishonorable act coexist? How might ambition and good intentions co-exist? How might they conflict?
3. What tension does Brutus feel between his personal loyalty to Caesar and his political ideals? Why do the conspirators need to win Brutus to their cause? What tactics does Cassius use to win over Brutus? Why does Brutus argue against killing Mark Antony?
4. What do the conspirators hope to gain by assassinating Caesar? How do the conspirators build their plot against him? How do their actions reveal the truth of their motives? In what situation, if any, might political assassination be justified?
5. Who has the strongest allegiances in the play? To what or to whom? How are these allegiances tested? Who proves their allegiance?
6. In what ways does the natural world reflect the disturbance in the political world of Rome? At what point in the play does the natural world seem to return to a peaceful state? What are the prophecies or supernatural signs that appear in the play? How are the supernatural signs interpreted? Who ignores or heeds these signs? Why? What types of supernatural events continue after Caesar's death? Which character's actions are ruled by fate? Which characters are driven by free will?

What themes are highlighted in our 2017 production? How does the setting and style of the production inform your understanding of *Julius Caesar*?



2017 *Julius Caesar* set model. Designed by Sibyl Wickersheimer.

7. Chart the motif of ears in the play by giving specific instances of overhearing, eavesdropping, spying and listening. What might Shakespeare be saying about words and the nature of listening? Which characters truly listen to each other? Which characters don't and to what effect?
8. Why is the play called *Julius Caesar*? Based on the characters who dominate the storyline, what are other possible titles of the play?
9. What are the heroic aspects of Caesar? What are his strengths? What are his physical weaknesses? Emotional weaknesses? Why does he often refer to himself in the third person? Why does Shakespeare both build up Caesar's accomplishments and point out his flaws? In what ways does the glorification of Caesar and his name lead to his eventual demise?
10. Compare and contrast the relationship between Brutus and Portia to Julius Caesar and Calphurnia. Why won't Brutus tell Portia what he and the conspirators are planning to do? How does Julius Caesar react to Calphurnia when she reveals her dreams to him? What comes between Calphurnia and Portia's ability to achieve what they desire from their respective husbands?
11. What are some of the differences between the public figure Julius Caesar and the private person? What does Julius Caesar represent to the plebeians? To the conspirators? To Mark Antony?



2017 *Julius Caesar* costume rendering for Julius Caesar by Raquel Barreto.

12. As Julius Caesar is surrounded by his assassins, he asks, "Et tu, Brute?" (You too, Brutus?) Why does Caesar single out Brutus? How does Brutus react and in what ways is it in line with their relationship? In what ways does the power of Caesar's name continue to grow after his assassination?
13. Why does Mark Antony pretend to be friends with the conspirators? What are his true intentions? What tactics does he use to carry out his intentions?

CAESAR AND HIS FOLLOWERS

JULIUS CAESAR

Triumphant Roman general who wants to rule Rome.

CALPHURNIA

Caesar's wife who warns him of omens foretelling his death.

MARK ANTONY

Soldier and loyal friend of Caesar.

OCTAVIUS CAESAR

Julius Caesar's adopted son. Returns to Rome after Caesar's death and joins forces with Mark Anthony.

SENATORS SUPPORTING CAESAR

Cicero, Publius, Popilius Lena, Artemidorus

BRUTUS, CASSIUS AND SUPPORTERS

MARCUS BRUTUS

Senator and nobleman. Friend of Caesar who fears for the future of the Republic.

PORTIA

Brutus's wife. She embodies dignity and steadfastness.

CASSIUS

Brutus's brother-in-law and conspirator against Casesar.

CONSPIRATORS AGAINST CAESAR

Caska, Decius Brutus, Trebonius, Ligarius, Metellus Cimber, Cinna

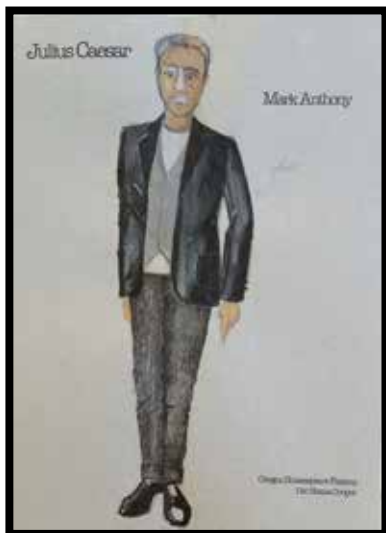
Roman territory map at the death of Julius Caesar

After seeing/reading the play *continued*

14. Refer to your research on rhetorical devices. Compare the orations of Brutus and Mark Antony after Caesar's death. What effect do they have on the plebeians' allegiances? Why does Mark Antony use the word "honorable" and "ambition" so many times? How do those words change in the speech? What makes the speech sincere? Ironic?

15. Refer to your research on tragic flaws. What is Caesar's tragic flaw? Brutus's? In what ways are their errors in judgment related to their relationships? In what ways are their errors in judgment tied to their aspirations and ideals?

16. Find descriptions in the dialogue of the common people or plebeians. What qualities does Shakespeare emphasize? To what do they respond positively? To what do they respond negatively?



2017 Julius Caesar costume rendering for Mark Anthony by Raquel Barreto.

17. Discuss Mark Antony's journey through the play. How does he rise to power? What do people say about him in the play? In what ways is he the defender of the people or an ambitious, opportunistic politician or both?

18. Compare and contrast Cassius and Brutus. What are some of their differences? Similarities? How would you describe each man's character? How would you describe their relationship? Who holds the power in their relationship? What is the source of this power? When does the power shift between them?



2017 Julius Caesar costume rendering for Marcus Brutus by Raquel Barreto.

19. Why do Cassius and Brutus clash in Brutus's tent in Act IV, scene iii? What faults do they reveal about themselves in this scene? What strengths? How do they resolve their difficulties? How is their relationship changed in the scene?

20. What is the significance of the appearance of Caesar's ghost? What does it portend? What other supernatural signs or omens continue to appear after Caesar's death?

21. Why does Mark Antony call Brutus "the noblest Roman of them all?" What are Brutus's noble qualities? Which of his qualities are less than noble?

22. Refer to your research on honor and suicide. Brutus falls on his own sword and commits suicide. How does contemporary American society view suicide? How is this view of suicide different from that of the ancient Romans? How does Brutus's view on suicide change in the play? What does this change say about him?

After seeing/reading the play

continued

23. Who in this play acts honorably? How is loyalty portrayed in *Julius Caesar*? How has our definition of honor changed since ancient Roman times? Which characters stay true to what they have revealed about themselves throughout the play?

24. How do the strengths and flaws of Julius Caesar, Mark Antony, Brutus and Cassius drive the events of the play? What are some of the differences between their public lives and their private relationships with each other? How did their private relationships with each other strengthen or weaken their public lives?



2017 *Julius Caesar* set model. Designed by Sibyl Wickersheimer.



2017 *Julius Caesar* costume rendering for Cassius by Raquel Barreto.

25. Movement was central to Director Shana Cooper's vision for the world of *Julius Caesar*. How does this production show the battles that end the play? Why do you think that the director and creative team decided to show the battles this way? What story does the movement tell you about who has power in this story?

26. In *Julius Caesar*, many characters talk about the weather and other phenomena of the natural world. Did you see any parallels to the environment you live in and how you see the natural world?

27. If you have seen a play performed live before, how was your experience different watching a video recording? Were there things you missed about a live performance? Were there things you discovered about the play and your experience as an audience member while watching a video recording?

28. If you have never seen a play performed live before, what do you think might have been different about your experience watching this production on a screen?

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