

Lesson 1

Background Material for *Julius Caesar*

and return to Rome. But Caesar, with his army, crossed the Rubicon River (which separated Gaul from Italy), invaded Rome, and made himself absolute ruler of Rome. Meanwhile, Pompey fled to Greece. Caesar defeated Pompey's army at Pharsalia (48 B.C.) and Pompey fled to Egypt, where he was later murdered.

Three years after the battle of Pharsalia, Caesar defeated Pompey's two sons at Munda, Spain. By now, Caesar had been made dictator for life. Thus, as Shakespeare begins his play with Caesar returning in victory from Spain, Caesar was the undisputed leader and master of the entire Roman world (see the map on Handout 3).

For centuries, Romans debated and even fought civil wars while trying to decide whether a monarchy, a republic, or a dictatorship was the best form of government. Until 509 B.C., Rome was a monarchy, but, in that year, the Brutus family evicted Tarquinius Superbus from the throne, and Rome was established as a republic. The people soon discovered, however, that they had merely exchanged rule by a king for rule by a group of wealthy Romans called patricians.

By 100 B.C., Rome was a moderate democracy in form; in actual practice, Rome was being ruled by the Senate. Julius Caesar (102?-44 B.C.) was a patrician but cast his lot with the people. By spending money for public entertainment and establishing laws freeing farmers and tradesmen from heavy taxes, he gained their support. In 60 B.C., a triumvirate (a three-man rule) of Caesar, Crassus, and Pompey was formed to govern Rome.

In 58 B.C., Caesar was made governor of part of Gaul (an area now encompassing southern France and northern Italy), and at the age of forty-four, he began his military career. During the next ten years, he proceeded to conquer all of Gaul.

After Crassus was killed while conducting a military campaign in Parthia, trouble began to develop between Pompey and Caesar. Pompey, jealous of Caesar's popularity, persuaded the Senate to order Caesar to disband his army

An Introduction to *Julius Caesar*

Along with *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Coriolanus*, and *Titus Andronicus*, *Julius Caesar* forms the basis of Shakespeare's Roman plays, which deal with Roman generals and the life and times of ancient Rome. Shakespeare's source was ultimately Plutarch's *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*. Plutarch's book was translated into French by Jacques Amyot in 1559; Amyot's book was, in turn, translated into English by Sir Thomas North in 1579.

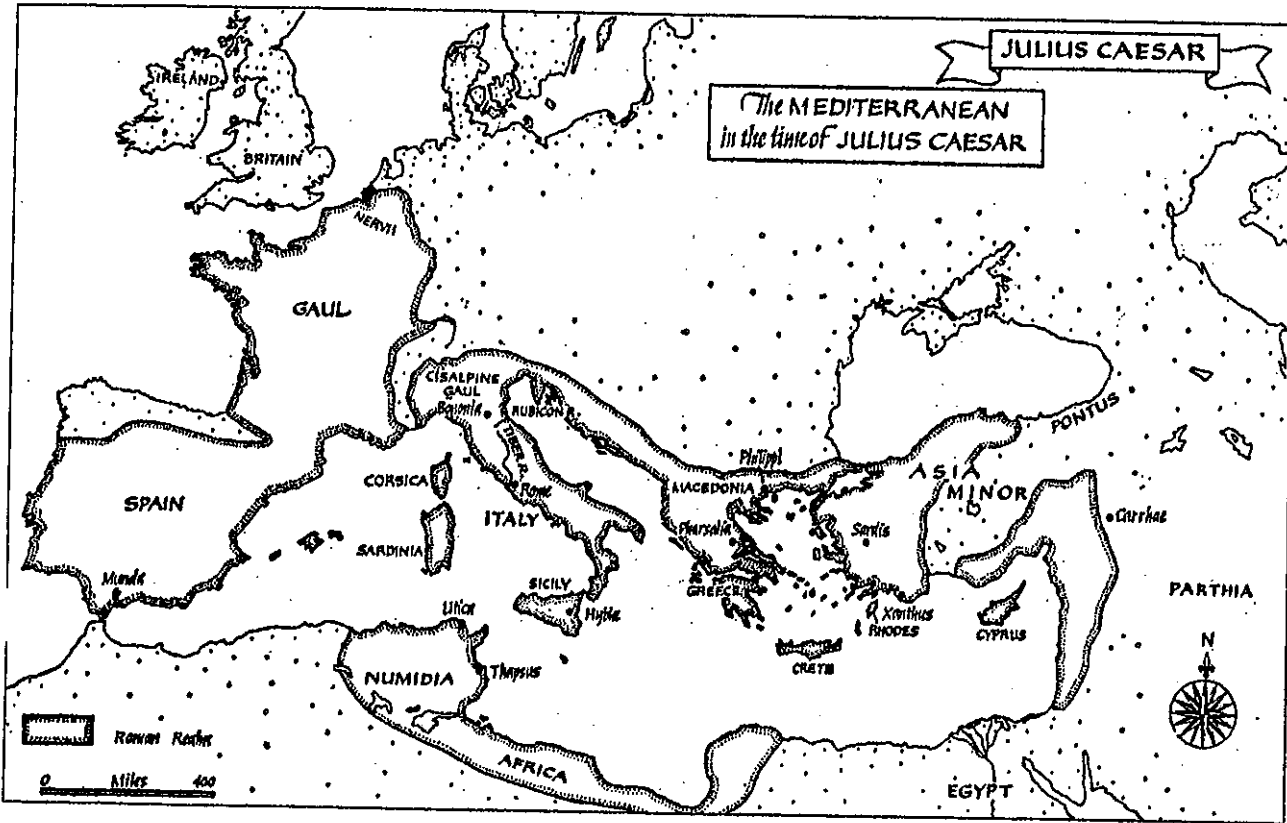
Julius Caesar is a political play, and political issues are the root of the tragic conflict in the play. It is a play about a general who would be king, but who, because of his own pride and ambition, meets an untimely death. Shakespeare deals with why Caesar was murdered and subsequently what happened to his murderers. Shakespeare seems to be saying that good government must be based upon morality. In this respect, *Julius Caesar* has relevance to the politics of the modern world.

Although the play is named *Julius Caesar*, Caesar dominates only the first half of the play. This fact has led some critics to conclude that the play might more aptly be named *The Tragedy of Marcus Brutus*, the man who dominates much of the play. Caesar's influence, however, is felt throughout the play: after Caesar's death, his ghost appears to Brutus the night before the battle on the plains of Philippi, and both Brutus and Cassius refer to Caesar before their own deaths. Thus, it may be convincingly argued that the main character is indeed Julius Caesar and that *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar* is a fitting title for the play.

Julius Caesar is one of Shakespeare's most teachable plays. The language is not too difficult, the action is swift and exciting, and the plot is clear and free from confusing subplots. Whereas *Hamlet* should be one of the last Shakespearean plays students read, *Julius Caesar* is an excellent place to introduce Shakespeare to high school students.

Where's Where in Julius Caesar

This map lists the Roman kingdom during Caesar's time as ruler. Refer to it as necessary, especially during your reading of acts 4 and 5.



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Who's Who in *Julius Caesar*

The First Triumvirate (before play begins)

Julius Caesar

Crassus

Pompey

The Second Triumvirate (after Caesar dies)

Octavius Caesar

Mark Antony

M. Lepidus

Julius Caesar, dictator of Rome—Calpurnia, his wife

Marcus Brutus, Roman praetor—Portia, his wife

Servants to Brutus

Claudius

Clitus

Dardanius

Lucius

Strato

Varro

Comrades in Arms with Brutus

Young Cato

Messala

Titinius

Volumnius

Lucilius

Conspirators against Caesar

Marcus Brutus

Decius Brutus

Casca

Cassius

Metellus Cimber

Cinna

Ligarius

Trebonius

Pindarius, servant of Cassius

Artemidorus, teacher of rhetoric and a soothsayer

Senators

Cicero

Popilius Lena

Publius

Tribunes

Flavius

Marullus

Other senators, citizens, guards, attendants, and another poet

Name _____

Julius Caesar
Study Questions

Write a brief answer to each study question as you read the play at home or in class. When you study for the final exam, use the questions for review.

Introduction

1. What event in Caesar's career immediately preceded the play's action?
2. Give the date of the assassination of Caesar.

ACT I

Scene i

1. What is a tribune?
2. Why do Flavius and Marullus want the commoners to disperse? Why do they remove the garlands from Caesar's statue?

Scene ii

1. Why does Caesar tell Calpurnia to stand close to the racers so Antony can touch her?
2. How does Cassius feel about Caesar? What does he want Brutus to do?
3. How does Caesar feel about Cassius?
4. Why does the crowd cheer during this scene?
5. What physical disabilities does Caesar have?
6. What does Cassius conclude about Brutus?

Scene iii

1. When does this scene take place?
2. What strange omens are seen?
3. What is learned about the conspiracy against Caesar in this scene?

ACT II

Scene i

1. What is the meaning of Brutus' speech, lines 10-34?
2. Why is no oath sworn by the conspirators?
3. Why is Cicero left out of the conspiracy?
4. Why does Brutus not want Antony killed?
5. How does Decius plan to persuade Caesar to go to the Capitol?
6. How does Portia show Brutus she can be trusted? Will he tell her his secrets?

Scene ii

1. What omens frighten Calpurnia?
2. Is she successful in persuading Caesar not to go to the Senate?
3. Why does he change his mind?

Scene iii

1. What is Artemidorus planning to do?

Name _____

Scene iv

1. What are Portia's feelings in this scene?

ACT III

Scene i

1. What two warnings does Caesar ignore?
2. What was the specific task each of the following had to perform in order to execute the slaying?
 - a. Metellus Cimber
 - b. Casca
 - c. Trebonius
3. How does Metellus Cimber get Caesar's attention?
4. What do we learn about Caesar's character from his reply to Metellus Cimber?
5. What is significant about Caesar's famous line, "Et tu Brute?" immediately before he dies?
6. What happens immediately after Caesar is killed?
7. Is Antony honest when he speaks to the conspirators? How do you know?
8. Who is coming to Rome? What advice does Antony give?

Scene ii

1. Does Brutus appeal to the emotions or the reasoning powers of the crowd?
2. What reason does Brutus give for the murder of Caesar?
3. What word does Antony emphasize in his speech? Why?
4. How does Antony use "reverse psychology" in talking to the crowd?
5. Describe the crowd's reaction after both speeches. What does this tell you about the crowd in general?
6. How does Antony entice the crowd to listen to him?

Scene iii

1. What is the purpose of this scene?

ACT IV

Scene i

1. What three men make up the new triumvirate?
2. What are they doing as the scene opens?
3. What opinion does Antony have of Lepidus?

Scene ii

1. Where does this scene take place?
2. What feelings exist between Brutus and Cassius?

Scene iii

1. What are the reasons behind the quarrel between Brutus and Cassius?
2. How does the quarrel end?

Name _____

3. What has happened to Portia?
4. Why does Cassius want to be on the defensive and wait to be attacked where they are camped?
5. What is Brutus' reason for wanting to take the offensive and march to Philippi?
6. Which strategy is decided upon? Why?
7. Why does Brutus have Varro and Claudius sleep in his tent?
8. What premonition does Brutus have of his death?
9. What "visitor" does Brutus have in the night? What warning does he receive?

ACT V

Scene i

1. Where does the action in this scene occur? How is this important to the play?
2. What lines imply that there will be results by the end of the day?
3. What are Cassius' thoughts of the future?
4. What does Brutus imply he will do if he sees that he is losing?

Scene ii

1. What prompted Brutus to send Messala with a message to the troops?

Scene iii

1. What does Pindarus report to Cassius?
2. How does Cassius die?
3. Who had actually surrounded Titinius?
4. What is the meaning of Brutus' lines, "O Julius Caesar, Thou art mighty yet!"?

Scene iv

1. What action in the scene shows you that Brutus' men respect and protect him?

Scene v

1. How does the action in this scene add to the idea shown in scene iv?
2. Of what glory does Brutus speak in line 36?
3. Explain the meaning of Brutus' final speech, lines 50-51.
4. Explain Antony's final speech, lines 68-75.
5. What is the mood of the final scene?