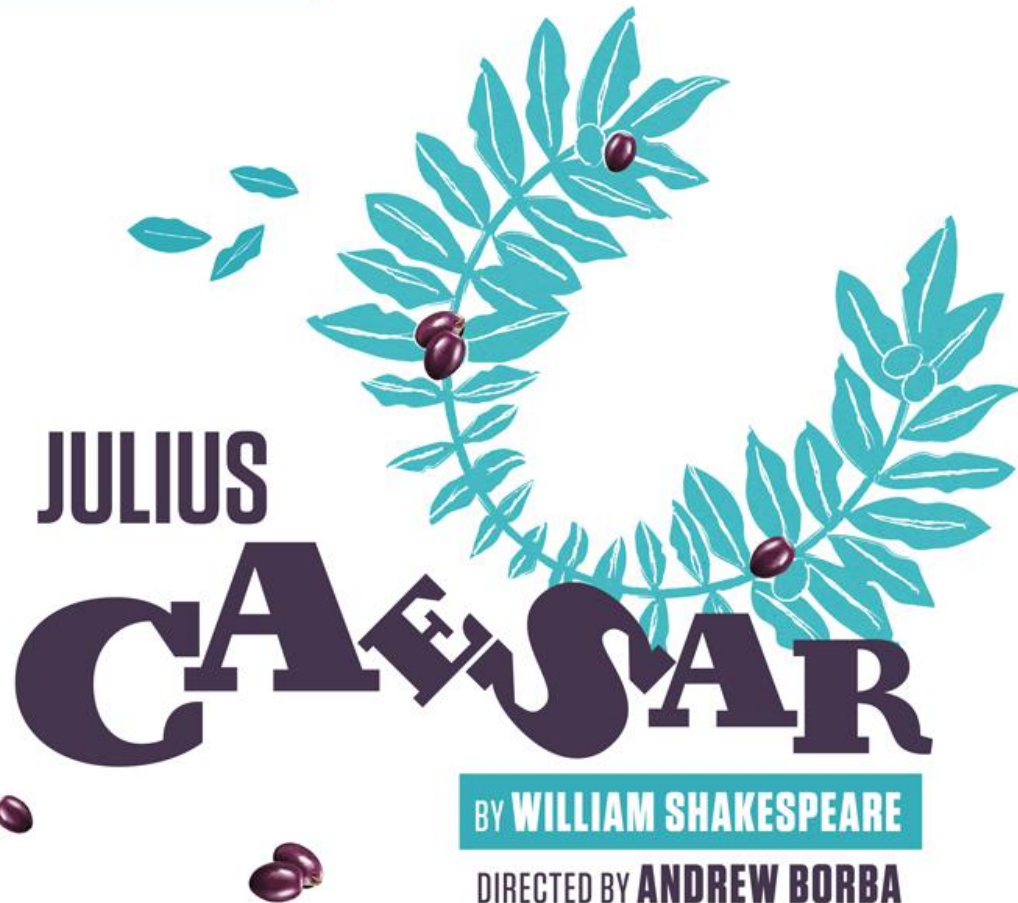


PLAYMAKERS
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MAR 4-22



JULIUS
CAESAR

BY **WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE**

DIRECTED BY **ANDREW BORBA**

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A Student Guide

Character List

JULIUS CAESAR, Roman statesman and general

OCTAVIUS, Triumvir after Caesar's death, later Augustus Caesar, first emperor of Rome

MARK ANTONY, general and friend of Caesar, a Triumvir after his death

LEPIDUS, third member of the Triumvirate

MARCUS BRUTUS, leader of the conspiracy against Caesar

CASSIUS, instigator of the conspiracy

CASCA, conspirator against Caesar

TREBONIUS, conspirator against Caesar

CAIUS LIGARIUS, conspirator against Caesar

DECIUS BRUTUS, conspirator against Caesar

METELLUS CIMBER, conspirator against Caesar

CINNA, conspirator against Caesar

CALPURNIA, wife of Caesar

PORTIA, wife of Brutus

CICERO, senator

FLAVIUS, tribune

MARULLUS, tribune

CATO, supporter of Brutus

LUCILIUS, supporter of Brutus

TITINIUS, supporter of Brutus

MESSALA, supporter of Brutus

VOLUMNIUS, supporter of Brutus

CINNA, a poet

VARRO, officer to Brutus

CLITUS, officer to Brutus

CLAUDIS, officer to Brutus

STRATO, officer to Brutus

LUCIUS, officer to Brutus

DARDANIUS, officer to Brutus

PINDARUS, servant to Cassius

A Soothsayer

Senators, Citizens, Soldiers, Commoners, Messengers, and Servants

Synopsis

Two tribunes, Flavius and Murellus, find scores of Roman citizens wandering the streets, neglecting their work in order to watch Julius Caesar's triumphal parade: Caesar has defeated the sons of the deceased Roman general Pompey, his archrival, in battle. The tribunes scold the citizens for abandoning their duties and remove decorations from Caesar's statues. Caesar enters with his entourage, including the military and political figures Brutus, Cassius, and Antony. A Soothsayer calls out to Caesar to "beware the Ides of March," but Caesar ignores him and proceeds with his victory celebration.



Cassius and Brutus, both longtime intimates of Caesar and each other, converse. Cassius tells Brutus that he has seemed distant lately; Brutus replies that he has been at war with himself. Cassius states that he wishes Brutus could see himself as others see him, for then Brutus would realize how honored and respected he is. Brutus says that he fears that the people want Caesar to become king, which would overturn the republic. Cassius concurs that Caesar is treated like a god though he is merely a man, no better than Brutus or Cassius. Cassius recalls incidents of Caesar's physical weakness and marvels that this fallible man has become so powerful. He blames his and Brutus's lack of will for allowing Caesar's rise to power: surely the rise of such a man cannot be the work of fate. Brutus considers Cassius's words as Caesar returns. Upon seeing Cassius, Caesar tells Antony that he deeply distrusts Cassius.



Caesar departs, and another politician, Casca, tells Brutus and Cassius that, during the celebration, Antony offered the crown to Caesar three times and the people cheered, but Caesar refused it each time. He reports that Caesar then fell to the ground and had some kind of seizure before the crowd; his demonstration of weakness, however, did not alter the crowd's devotion to him. Brutus goes home to consider Cassius's words regarding Caesar's poor qualifications to rule, while Cassius hatches a plot to draw Brutus into a conspiracy against Caesar.

That night, Rome is plagued with violent weather and a variety of bad omens and portents. Brutus finds letters in his house apparently written by Roman citizens worried that Caesar has become too powerful. The letters have in fact been forged and planted by Cassius, who knows that if Brutus believes it is the people's will, he will support a plot to remove Caesar from power. A committed

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supporter of the republic, Brutus fears the possibility of a dictator-led empire, worrying that the populace would lose its voice. Cassius arrives at Brutus's home with his conspirators, and Brutus, who has already been won over by the letters, takes control of the meeting. The men agree to lure Caesar from his house and kill him. Cassius wants to kill Antony too, for Antony will surely try to hinder their plans, but Brutus disagrees, believing that too many deaths will render their plot too bloody and dishonor them. Having agreed to spare Antony, the conspirators depart. Portia, Brutus's wife, observes that Brutus appears preoccupied. She pleads with him to confide in her, but he rebuffs her.



Caesar prepares to go to the Senate. His wife, Calpurnia, begs him not to go, describing recent nightmares she has had in which a statue of Caesar streamed with blood and smiling men bathed their hands in the blood. Caesar refuses to yield to fear and insists on going about his daily business. Finally, Calpurnia convinces him to stay home—if not out of caution, then as a favor to her. But Decius, one of the conspirators, then arrives and convinces Caesar that Calpurnia has misinterpreted her dreams and the recent omens. Caesar departs for the Senate in the company of the conspirators.

As Caesar proceeds through the streets toward the Senate, the Soothsayer again tries but fails to get his attention. The citizen Artemidorus hands him a letter warning him about the conspirators, but Caesar refuses to read it, saying that his closest personal concerns are his last priority. At the Senate, the conspirators speak to Caesar, bowing at his feet and encircling him. One by one, they stab him to death. When Caesar sees his dear friend Brutus among his murderers, he gives up his struggle and dies.



The murderers bathe their hands and swords in Caesar's blood, thus bringing Calpurnia's premonition to fruition. Antony, having been led away on a false pretext, returns and pledges allegiance to Brutus but weeps over Caesar's body. He shakes hands with the conspirators, appearing to make a gesture of conciliation. When Antony asks why they killed Caesar, Brutus replies that he will explain their purpose in a funeral oration. Antony asks to be allowed to speak over the body as well; Brutus grants his permission, though Cassius remains suspicious of

Antony. The conspirators depart, and Antony, alone now, swears that Caesar's death shall be avenged.

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Brutus and Cassius go to the Forum to speak to the public. Cassius exits to address another part of the crowd. Brutus declares to the masses that though he loved Caesar, he loves Rome more, and Caesar's ambition posed a danger to Roman liberty. The speech placates the crowd. Antony appears with Caesar's body, and Brutus departs after turning the pulpit over to Antony.

Repeatedly referring to Brutus as "an honorable man," Antony's speech becomes increasingly sarcastic; questioning the claims that Brutus made in his speech that Caesar acted only out of ambition, Antony points out that Caesar brought much wealth and glory to Rome, and three times turned down offers of the crown. Antony then produces Caesar's will but announces that he will not read it for it would upset the people inordinately. The crowd nevertheless begs him to read the will, so he descends from the pulpit to stand next to Caesar's body. He describes Caesar's horrible death and shows Caesar's wounded body to the crowd. He then reads Caesar's will, which bequeaths a sum of money to every citizen and orders that his private gardens be made public. The crowd becomes enraged that this generous man lies dead; calling Brutus and Cassius traitors, the masses set off to drive them from the city.



INTERMISSION



Meanwhile, Caesar's adopted son and appointed successor, Octavius, arrives in Rome and forms a three-person coalition with Antony and Lepidus. They prepare to fight Cassius and Brutus, who have been driven into exile and are raising armies outside the city. At the conspirators' camp, Brutus and Cassius have a heated argument regarding matters of money and honor, but they ultimately reconcile. Brutus reveals that he is sick with grief, for in his absence Portia has killed herself. The two continue to prepare for battle with Antony and Octavius. That night, the Ghost

of Caesar appears to Brutus, announcing that Brutus will meet him again on the battlefield.

Octavius and Antony march their army toward Brutus and Cassius. Antony tells Octavius where to attack, but Octavius says that he will make his own orders; he is already asserting his authority as the heir of Caesar and the next ruler of Rome. The opposing generals meet on the battlefield and exchange insults before beginning combat.

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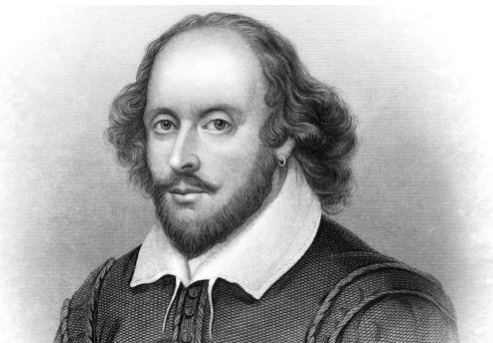
Cassius witnesses his own men fleeing and hears that Brutus's men are not performing effectively. Cassius sends one of his men, Pindarus, to see how matters are progressing. From afar, Pindarus sees one of their leaders, Cassius's best friend, Titinius, being surrounded by cheering troops and concludes that he has been captured. Cassius despairs and orders Pindarus to kill him with his own sword. He dies proclaiming that Caesar is avenged. Titinius himself then arrives—the men encircling him were actually his comrades, cheering a victory he had earned. Titinius sees Cassius's corpse and, mourning the death of his friend, kills himself.

Brutus learns of the deaths of Cassius and Titinius with a heavy heart and prepares to take on the Romans again. When his army loses, doom appears imminent. Brutus asks one of his men to hold his sword while he impales himself on it. Finally, Caesar can rest satisfied, he says as he dies. Octavius and Antony arrive. Antony speaks over Brutus's body, calling him the noblest Roman of all. While the other conspirators acted out of envy and ambition, he observes, Brutus genuinely believed that he acted for the benefit of Rome. Octavius orders that Brutus be buried in the most honorable way. The men then depart to celebrate their victory.



Biography of Playwright

William Shakespeare



Since William Shakespeare lived more than 400 years ago, and many records from that time are lost or never existed in the first place, we don't know everything about his life. William Shakespeare was probably born on about April 23, 1564. His father, John Shakespeare, was a leatherworker who specialized in the soft white leather used for gloves and similar items. A prosperous businessman, he married Mary Arden, of the prominent Arden family. John rose

through local offices in Stratford, becoming an alderman and eventually, when William was five, the town bailiff—much like a mayor.

Shakespeare, as the son of a leading Stratford citizen, almost certainly attended Stratford's grammar school. Like all such schools, its curriculum consisted of an intense emphasis on the Latin classics, including memorization, writing, and acting classic Latin plays. Shakespeare most likely attended until about age 15.

A few years after he left school, in late 1582, William Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway. She was already expecting their first-born child, Susanna, which was a fairly common situation at the time. When they married, Anne was 26 and William was 18. Anne grew up just outside Stratford in the village of Shottery. After marrying, she spent the rest of her life in Stratford.

In early 1585, the couple had twins, Judith and Hamnet, completing the family. For several years after Judith and Hamnet's arrival in 1585, nothing is known for certain of Shakespeare's activities: how he earned a living, when he moved from Stratford, or how he got his start in the theater.

Following this gap in the record, the first definite mention of Shakespeare is in 1592 as an established London actor and playwright, mocked by a contemporary as a "Shake-scene." The same writer alludes to one of Shakespeare's earliest history plays, *Henry VI, Part 3*, which must already have been performed. Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar*, or *Julius Caesar*, was first performed in 1599. For more than two decades, Shakespeare had multiple roles in the London theater as an actor, playwright, and, in time, a business partner in a major acting company, the Lord Chamberlain's Men (renamed the King's Men in 1603). Over the years, he became steadily more famous in the London theater world.

Among the last plays that Shakespeare worked on was *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, which he wrote with a frequent collaborator, John Fletcher, most likely in 1613. He died on April 23, 1616—the traditional date of his birthday. We also do not know the cause of his death. His brother-in-law had died a week earlier, which could imply infectious disease, but Shakespeare's health may have had a longer decline. Seven years after his death, Shakespeare's friends and colleagues produced the First Folio, a publication of 36 of his plays.

Themes of Play

Fate and Free Will

Julius Caesar raises many questions about the force of fate in life versus the capacity for free will. Cassius refuses to accept Caesar's rising power and deems a belief in fate to be nothing more than a form of passivity or cowardice. He says to Brutus: "Men at sometime were masters of their fates. / The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, / But in ourselves, that we are underlings." Cassius urges a return to a more noble, self-possessed attitude toward life, blaming his and Brutus's submissive stance not on a predestined plan but on their failure to assert themselves. Cassius believes fate is nothing more than a form of passivity or cowardice.

During Caesar's triumphal march into Rome, a soothsayer cries out from the crowd, "Beware the Ides of March!" Later, on the day of the assassination, the soothsayer positions himself among the crowd once again. Caesar, who'd curtly dismissed him the first time, sees the soothsayer and says rather challengingly, "The Ides of March are come." The soothsayer replies, "Aye, Caesar, but not gone." The play seems to present a philosophy in which fate and freedom maintain a delicate coexistence.

Misreading

Much of the play deals with the characters' failures to interpret correctly the omens that they encounter. The night before the assassination, Casca observes that the sky is filled with meteors, fiery figures roam the streets, and an owl shrieked in the marketplace at noon. There are so many omens, he tells Cicero, that he's convinced "they are portentous things / Unto the climate that the point upon." Cicero agrees that it's all quite strange, but that "men may construe things after their fashion, / Clean from the purpose of the things themselves." Arguably, Cicero's words end up being more prophetic than the mysterious signs themselves—when Casca talks with Cassius thereafter, Cassius uses the omens to persuade Casca that Caesar has grown "prodigious [...] and fearful, as these strange eruptions are" and must therefore be killed. The conspiracy to kill Caesar predates the "strange eruptions," and Cassius reads the omens as a positive sign of imminent success, rather than as a warning, in order to win Casca to his cause. This suggests that, as Cicero has argued, people will see what they choose to see.

There are calculated misreadings as well: Cassius manipulates Brutus into joining the conspiracy by means of forged letters, knowing that Brutus's trusting nature will cause him to accept the letters as authentic pleas from the Roman people. When Calpurnia dreams that Caesar's statue spurts blood, in which Romans happily bathe themselves, Caesar wrestles with its meaning. Based on the dream and the other alarming signs, Calpurnia at first convinces Caesar to stay home from the Capitol; but when Decius arrives—dispatched by the other conspirators to ensure the newly superstitious Caesar's attendance at the Senate—he puts a different spin on things: "This dream is all amiss interpreted. / It was a vision fair and fortunate." The people's eagerness for Caesar's blood, claims Decius, signifies not that anyone seeks to kill him, but that Caesar has a reviving impact on Rome. This almost laughable twist on a grisly dream persuades Caesar to leave the house despite Calpurnia's warnings—suggesting that he was determined to do so anyway, and that Decius's words simply provide the justification.

Themes of Play

Language and Power

Julius Caesar gives detailed consideration to the relationship between language and power. Though there is certainly violence in *Julius Caesar*, characters spend far more time talking to one another than they do fighting or killing, and much of that talk takes the form of argument and debate. The ability to make things happen by words alone is the most powerful type of authority. Early in the play, it is established that Caesar has this type of absolute authority: “When Caesar says ‘Do this,’ it is performed,” says Antony. Words also serve to move hearts and minds. Antony cleverly convinces the conspirators of his desire to side with them: “Let each man render me with his bloody hand.” Under the guise of a gesture of friendship, Antony actually marks the conspirators for vengeance. In the Forum, Brutus speaks to the crowd and appeals to its love of liberty in order to justify the killing of Caesar. He builds a careful case for Caesar’s death, counting on the masses to grasp that it’s “not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved / Rome more...” Notably, the people respond favorably to this speech, with cries like, “Give him a statue with his ancestors!” and “Let him be Caesar!” They aren’t actually responding to his actual argument—in the passion of the moment, they’re praising Brutus himself, superficially transferring their allegiance from Caesar to Brutus (much as they did when celebrating Caesar’s defeat of Pompey at the beginning of the play). He also makes ample reference to the honor in which he is generally esteemed so as to validate further his explanation of the deed.

Antony likewise wins the crowd’s favor, using persuasive rhetoric to whip the masses into a frenzy so great that they don’t even realize the fickleness of their favor. Though he protests that, “I am no orator, as Brutus is,” the opposite is the case. Antony ably uses various rhetorical techniques—pausing to openly weep, for example, displaying Caesar’s will at the climax of his speech, and even using Caesar’s dead body as a sort of prop—to heighten the people’s emotions much more effectively than Brutus was able to do when he spoke. The fickleness of the crowds throughout the play isn’t necessarily meant to suggest that the masses are unintelligent, but that, especially in moments of high drama, people are swayed as much by their emotions—and the proximity of others’ emotions—as by the precise arguments being presented to them.

Honor

In the Roman world of *Julius Caesar*, masculinity is associated with honor, which is in turn is a matter of selflessness, rationality, and pride. For example, [Julius Caesar](#) himself suffers from weaknesses that earn onlookers’ scorn, yet he still inspires fear, and he doesn’t falter in the face of likely assassination. No character in the play more clearly embodies the virtue of honor than Brutus. Nearly every character recognizes Brutus’s reputation for honor, yet his intentions are questioned. For instance, Cassius exploits this reputation when he recruits Brutus into the assassination conspiracy, hoping that Brutus’s renowned honor will legitimize the conspiracy. During Antony’s funeral speech for Caesar, Antony deploys the refrain “Brutus is an honorable man” ironically in order to cast doubt on Brutus’s allegedly honorable intentions, which the masses had been praising moments before. Antony’s emotionally-laden speech ends up shifting the people’s allegiance from Brutus to himself, and sends Brutus and the conspirators into exile from [Rome](#). And yet, at the end of the play, Antony celebrates Brutus’s honor even after the latter’s death, concluding that of all the

Themes of Play

conspirators, only Brutus's intentions were noble. Because of his rejection of envy and consistent action according to honest principles, the world can look upon Brutus in death and say, "This was a man."

Another key element of honor in *Julius Caesar* relates to loyalty, a matter that proves somewhat complicated in a play where excessive loyalty leads to much political strife. Shakespeare constructed his play around two central friendships: one between Brutus and Cassius, and another between Caesar and Antony. Although the profound loyalty that defines each of these friendships is touching, that same loyalty also proves dangerous. For example, Cassius leverages his devotion to Brutus to convince his friend to join the assassination plot. Brutus in turn allows his love for Cassius to lead him into errors of judgment that ultimately result in both of their deaths. Just as Cassius and Brutus act out of mutual loyalty, Antony also acts out of a deep devotion to Caesar and, later, to Octavius. Although Antony initially claims the justness of the conspirators' cause, he demonstrates his ongoing loyalty to Caesar when he turns the Roman public against the conspirators at Caesar's funeral—an act that instigates rioting and war. These characters demonstrate honor through friendship, and yet their loyalty also destroys the Republic.

While You Watch Activities

Activity 1: **Why Should That Name Be Sounded More than Yours?**

Write down the words used to describe Caesar, both by his supporters and those who conspire against him. Why is there such a difference in how these characters describe him?

Caesar's Supporters	The Conspirators

While You Watch Activities

Activity 2: Who Ever Knew the Heavens Menace So?

List all the omens, nightmares, and foreshadowing that appear in the play. When were they heeded, and when where they ignored? By whom? What effect did this have on how the play unfolds? If they weren't heeded, what would have happened differently if they had been taken seriously?

Omen, Nightmare or Foreshadowing	Ignored or Heeded?	By Whom?	Effect

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