



# Insights

*A Study Guide to the Utah Shakespearean Festival*



*Julius  
Caesar*

The articles in this study guide are not meant to mirror or interpret any productions at the Utah Shakespearean Festival. They are meant, instead, to be an educational jumping-off point to understanding and enjoying the plays (in any production at any theatre) a bit more thoroughly. Therefore the stories of the plays and the interpretative articles (and even characters, at times) may differ dramatically from what is ultimately produced on the Festival's stages.

The Study Guide is published by the Utah Shakespearean Festival, 351 West Center Street; Cedar City, UT 84720. Bruce C. Lee, communications director and editor; Phil Hermansen, art director.

Copyright © 2008, Utah Shakespearean Festival. Please feel free to download and print The Study Guide, as long as you do not remove any identifying mark of the Utah Shakespearean Festival.

For more information about Festival education programs:

Utah Shakespearean Festival

351 West Center Street

Cedar City, Utah 84720

435-586-7880

[www.bard.org](http://www.bard.org)

# *Julius Caesar*

## Contents

### Information on William Shakespeare

Shakespeare: Words, Words, Words	4
Not of an Age, but for All Mankind	6
Elizabeth's England	8
History Is Written by the Victors	10
Mr. Shakespeare, I Presume	11
A Nest of Singing Birds	12
Actors in Shakespeare's Day	14
Audience: A Very Motley Crowd	16
Shakespearean Snapshots	18
Ghosts, Witches, and Shakespeare	20
What They Wore	22

### Information on the Play

About the Play	23
Synopsis	25
Characters	26

### Scholarly Articles on the Play

Hail Caesar	28
The Concept of Honor	29
A Play of Paradoxes	31
A Play of Organization Men	33
Did Julius Caesar Choose to Die	34
The Truth about Julius Caesar	36

### Classroom Materials

Why We Study Julius Caesar	38
Vocabulary/Glossary of Terms	40
Famous Lines and Phrases	42
Figurative Language	43
Shakespeare's Language: Prose vs Verse	45
Evolving English	47
Elementary School Discussion Questions	48
High School Discussion Questions	49
Activities	50
Lesson Plan	52

# Shakespeare: Words, Words, Words

By S. S. Moorty

“No household in the English-speaking world is properly furnished unless it contains copies of the Holy Bible and of The Works of William Shakespeare. It is not always thought that these books should be read in maturer years, but they must be present as symbols of Religion and Culture” (G.B. Harrison, *Introducing Shakespeare*. Rev. & Exp. [New York: Penguin Books, 1991], 11).

We, the Shakespearean-theater goers and lovers, devotedly and ritualistically watch and read the Bard’s plays not for exciting stories and complex plots. Rather, Shakespeare’s language is a vital source of our supreme pleasure in his plays. Contrary to ill-conceived notions, Shakespeare’s language is not an obstacle to appreciation, though it may prove to be difficult to understand. Instead, it is the communicative and evocative power of Shakespeare’s language that is astonishingly rich in vocabulary—about 29,000 words—strikingly presented through unforgettable characters such as Hamlet, Macbeth, Lear, Othello, Rosalind, Viola, Iago, Shylock, etc.

In the high school classroom, students perceive Shakespeare’s language as “Old English.” Actually Shakespeare’s linguistic environment, experience, and exposure was, believe it or not, closer to our own times than to Chaucer’s, two hundred years earlier. Indeed, the history and development of the English language unfolds as follows: Old English, 449–1100; Middle English 1100–1500; and Modern English 1500–present. Shakespeare was firmly in the Modern English period.

At the time Shakespeare wrote, most of the grammatical changes from Old and Middle English had taken place; yet rigid notions about “correctness” had not yet been standardized in grammars. The past five centuries have advanced the cause of standardized positions for words; yet the flexible idiom of Elizabethan English offered abundant opportunities for Shakespeare’s linguistic inventiveness. Ideally it is rewarding to study several facets of Shakespeare’s English: pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, wordplay, and imagery. The present overview will, however, be restricted to “vocabulary.”

To Polonius’s inquisitive question “What do you read, my lord?” (*Hamlet*, 2.2.191) Hamlet nonchalantly and intriguingly aptly replies: “Words, words, words” (2.2.192). This many-splendored creation of Shakespeare’s epitomizes the playwright’s own fascination with the dynamic aspect of English language, however troubling it may be to modern audiences and readers. Shakespeare added several thousand words to the language, apart from imparting new meanings to known words. At times Shakespeare could teasingly employ the same word for different shades of thought. Barowne’s single line, “Light, seeking light, doth light of light beguile” (*Love’s Labour’s Lost*, 1.1.77), as Harry Levin in his *General Introduction to The Riverside Shakespeare* (9) explains, “uses ‘light’ in four significations: intellect, seeking wisdom, cheats eyesight out of daylight.”

Another instance: Othello as he enters his bedroom with a light before he smothers his dear, innocent Desdemona soliloquizes: “Put out the light, and then put out the light” (*Othello*, 5.2.7) Here ‘light’ compares the light of Othello’s lamp or torch to Desdemona’s ‘light’ of life.

In both instances, the repeated simple ordinary word carries extraordinary shades of meaning. “Usually such a tendency in a Shakespeare play indicates a more or less conscious thematic intent.” (Paul A. Jorgensen, *Redeeming Shakespeare’s Words* [Berkeley and Los Angeles; University of California Press, 1962], 100).

Living in an age of the “grandiose humanistic confidence in the power of the word” (Levin 9), Shakespeare evidently felt exuberant that he had the license to experiment with the language, further blessed by the fact that “there were no English grammars to lay down rules or dictionaries to restrict word-formation. This was an immeasurable boon for writers” (Levin 10). Surely Shakespeare took full advantage of the unparalleled linguistic freedom to invent, to experiment with, and to indulge in lavishly.

However intriguing, captivating, mind-teasing, beguiling, and euphonious, Shakespeare’s vocabulary can be a stumbling block, especially for readers. “In the theater the speaking actor frequently relies on tone, semantic drive, narrative context, and body language to communicate the sense of utterly unfamiliar terms and phrases, but on the page such words become more noticeable and confusing” (Russ McDonald, *The Bedford Companion to Shakespeare: An Introduction with Documents* [Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin’s Press, 1996], 184).

Unlocking the meaning of Shakespeare’s vocabulary can prove to be an interesting challenge. Such words include those which “have dropped from common use like ‘bisson’ (blind) or those that the playwright seems to have created from Latin roots . . . but that did not catch on, such as ‘conspectuities’ (eyesight or vision) or ‘unplausible’ (doubtful or disapproving). Especially confusing are those words that have shifted meaning over the intervening centuries, such as ‘proper’ (handsome), ‘nice’ (squeamish or delicate), ‘silly’ (innocent), or ‘cousin’ (kinsman, that is, not necessarily the child of an aunt or uncle” (McDonald 184). Because of semantic change, when Shakespeare uses ‘conceit,’ he does not mean ‘vanity,’ as we might understand it to be. Strictly following etymology, Shakespeare means a ‘conception’ or ‘notion,’ or possibly the ‘imagination’ itself.

Perhaps several Shakespearean words “would have been strange to Shakespeare’s audience because they were the products of his invention or unique usage. Some words that probably originated with him include: ‘auspicious,’ ‘assassination,’ ‘disgraceful,’ ‘dwindle,’ ‘savagery.’” Certainly a brave soul, he was “ a most audacious inventor of words.” To appreciate and understand Shakespeare’s English in contrast to ours, we ought to suspend our judgment and disbelief and allow respect for the “process of semantic change, which has been continually eroding or encrusting his original meaning” (Levin 8).

Shakespeare’s vocabulary has received greater attention than any other aspect of his language. Perhaps this is because it is the most accessible with no burdensome complications. Whatever the cause, Shakespeare’s language will forever be challenging and captivating.

# Not of an Age, but for All Mankind

By Douglas A. Burger

After an enormous expenditure of money and effort, Shakespeare's Globe Theater has risen again, four centuries later, on London's south bank of the Thames. Designed as a faithful reconstruction of the original, it uses the building methods of the time and traditional materials (oak timbers, plaster walls, wooden pegs, water-reeds for thatching the roof). From above, the shape seems circular (actually, it is twenty-six sided) with three covered tiers of seats surrounding a central area which is open to the sky. There the "groundlings" may stand to see the action taking place on the stage, which occupies almost half of the inner space. There are no artificial lights, no conventional sets, no fancy rigging.

Seeing a Shakespeare play in the afternoon sunlight at the new Globe must come very close to the experience of those early-day Londoners, except, of course, that we in the twentieth-century behave better. We don't yell insults at the actors, spit, or toss orange peels on the ground. We also smell better: the seventeenth-century playwright, Thomas Dekker, calls the original audience "Stinkards . . . glewed together in crowdes with the Steames of strong breath" (*Shakespeare's Globe: The Guide Book* [London: International Globe Center, 1996], 42). And we are safer. The first Globe burned to the ground. The new theater has more exits, fire-retardant insulation concealed in the walls, and water-sprinklers that poke through the thatch of the roof.

That hard-headed capitalists and officials would be willing, even eager, to invest in the project shows that Shakespeare is good business. The new Globe is just one example. Cedar City's own Utah Shakespearean Festival makes a significant contribution to the economy of southern Utah. A sizable percentage of all the tourist dollars spent in England goes to Shakespeare's birthplace, Stratford-on-Avon, which would be a sleepy little agricultural town without its favorite son. The situation seems incredible. In our whole history, what other playwright could be called a major economic force? Who else—what single individual—could be listed along with agriculture, mining, and the like as an industry of a region? Why Shakespeare?

The explanation, of course, goes further than an attempt to preserve our cultural traditions. In an almost uncanny way, Shakespeare's perceptions remain valuable for our own understandings of life, and probably no other writer remains so insightful, despite the constantly changing preoccupations of audiences over time.

The people of past centuries, for example, looked to the plays for nuggets of wisdom and quotable quotes, and many of Shakespeare's lines have passed into common parlance. There is an old anecdote about the woman, who on first seeing *Hamlet*, was asked how she liked the play. She replied, "Oh, very nice, my dear, but so full of quotations." She has it backwards of course. Only the King James Bible has lent more "quotations" to English than Shakespeare.

Citizens of the late nineteenth century sought in the plays for an understanding of human nature, valuing Shakespeare's character for traits that they recognized in themselves and in others. The fascination continues to the present day as some of our best-known movie stars attempt to find new dimensions in the great characters: Mel Gibson and Kenneth Branagh in *Hamlet*, Lawrence Fishburn in *Othello*, Leonardo de Caprio in *Romeo + Juliet*, to name just a few.

Matters of gender, class, and race have preoccupied more recent audiences. Beatrice sounds a rather feminist note in *Much Ado about Nothing* in her advice to her cousin about

choosing a husband: Curtsy to your father, but say “Father, as it please me.” *Coriolanus* presents a recurring dilemma about class relations in its explorations of the rights and wrongs involved in a great man’s attempt to control the masses. Racial attitudes are illuminated in *Othello*, where the European characters always mark the hero by his race, always identify him first as the “Moor,” are always aware of his difference. London’s new/old Globe is thus a potent symbol of the plays’ continuing worth to us. The very building demonstrates the utter accuracy of the lines written so long ago that Shakespeare is not “of an age” but “for all time.”

# Elizabeth's England

In his entire career, William Shakespeare never once set a play in Elizabethan England. His characters lived in medieval England (*Richard II*), France (*As You Like It*), Vienna (*Measure for Measure*), fifteenth-century Italy (*Romeo and Juliet*), the England ruled by Elizabeth's father (*Henry VIII*) and elsewhere—anywhere and everywhere, in fact, except Shakespeare's own time and place. But all Shakespeare's plays—even when they were set in ancient Rome—reflected the life of Elizabeth's England (and, after her death in 1603, that of her successor, James I). Thus, certain things about these extraordinary plays will be easier to understand if we know a little more about Elizabethan England.

Elizabeth's reign was an age of exploration—exploration of the world, exploration of man's nature, and exploration of the far reaches of the English language. This renaissance of the arts and sudden flowering of the spoken and written word gave us two great monuments—the King James Bible and the plays of Shakespeare—and many other treasures as well.

Shakespeare made full use of the adventurous Elizabethan attitude toward language. He employed more words than any other writer in history—more than 21,000 different words appear in the plays—and he never hesitated to try a new word, revive an old one, or make one up. Among the words which first appeared in print in his works are such everyday terms as “critic,” “assassinate,” “bump,” “gloomy,” “suspicious,” “and hurry;” and he invented literally dozens of phrases which we use today: such un-Shakespearean expressions as “catching a cold,” “the mind's eye,” “elbow room,” and even “pomp and circumstance.”

Elizabethan England was a time for heroes. The ideal man was a courtier, an adventurer, a fencer with the skill of Tybalt, a poet no doubt better than Orlando, a conversationalist with the wit of Rosalind and the eloquence of Richard II, and a gentleman. In addition to all this, he was expected to take the time, like Brutus, to examine his own nature and the cause of his actions and (perhaps unlike Brutus) to make the right choices. The real heroes of the age did all these things and more.

Despite the greatness of some Elizabethan ideals, others seem small and undignified, to us; marriage, for example, was often arranged to bring wealth or prestige to the family, with little regard for the feelings of the bride. In fact, women were still relatively powerless under the law.

The idea that women were “lower” than men was one small part of a vast concern with order which was extremely important to many Elizabethans. Most people believed that everything, from the lowest grain of sand to the highest angel, had its proper position in the scheme of things. This concept was called “the great chain of being.” When things were in their proper place, harmony was the result; when order was violated, the entire structure was shaken.

This idea turns up again and again in Shakespeare. The rebellion against Richard II brings bloodshed to England for generations; Romeo and Juliet's rebellion against their parents contributes to their tragedy; and the assassination in *Julius Caesar* throws Rome into civil war.

Many Elizabethans also perceived duplications in the chain of order. They believed, for example, that what the sun is to the heavens, the king is to the state. When something went wrong in the heavens, rulers worried: before Julius Caesar and Richard II were overthrown, comets and meteors appeared, the moon turned the color of blood, and other bizarre astronomical phenomena were reported. Richard himself compares his fall to a premature setting of the sun; when he descends from the top of Flint Castle to meet the conquering



Bolingbroke, he likens himself to the driver of the sun's chariot in Greek mythology:  
"Down, down I come, like glist'ring Phaeton" (3.3.178).

All these ideas find expression in Shakespeare's plays, along with hundreds of others—most of them not as strange to our way of thinking. As dramatized by the greatest playwright in the history of the world, the plays offer us a fascinating glimpse of the thoughts and passions of a brilliant age. Elizabethan England was a brief skyrocket of art, adventure, and ideas which quickly burned out; but Shakespeare's plays keep the best parts of that time alight forever.

(Adapted from "The Shakespeare Plays," educational materials made possible by Exxon, Metropolitan Life, Morgan Guaranty, and CPB.)

# History Is Written by the Victors

From *Insights*, 1994

William Shakespeare wrote ten history plays chronicling English kings from the time of the Magna Carta (*King John*) to the beginning of England's first great civil war, the Wars of the Roses (*Richard II*) to the conclusion of the war and the reuniting of the two factions (*Richard III*), to the reign of Queen Elizabeth's father (*Henry VIII*). Between these plays, even though they were not written in chronological order, is much of the intervening history of England, in the six Henry IV, Henry V, and Henry VI plays.

In writing these plays, Shakespeare had nothing to help him except the standard history books of his day. The art of the historian was not very advanced in this period, and no serious attempt was made to get at the exact truth about a king and his reign. Instead, the general idea was that any nation that opposed England was wrong, and that any Englishman who opposed the winning side in a civil war was wrong also.

Since Shakespeare had no other sources, the slant that appears in the history books of his time also appears in his plays. Joan of Arc opposed the English and was not admired in Shakespeare's day, so she is portrayed as a comic character who wins her victories through witchcraft. Richard III fought against the first Tudor monarchs and was therefore labeled in the Tudor histories as a vicious usurper, and he duly appears in Shakespeare's plays as a murdering monster.

Shakespeare wrote nine of his history plays under Queen Elizabeth. She did not encourage historical truthfulness, but rather a patriotism, an exultant, intense conviction that England was the best of all possible countries and the home of the most favored of mortals. And this patriotism breathes through all the history plays and binds them together. England's enemy is not so much any individual king as the threat of civil war, and the history plays come to a triumphant conclusion when the threat of civil war is finally averted, and the great queen, Elizabeth, is born.

Shakespeare was a playwright, not a historian, and, even when his sources were correct, he would sometimes juggle his information for the sake of effective stagecraft. He was not interested in historical accuracy; he was interested in swiftly moving action and in people. Shakespeare's bloody and superb king seems more convincing than the real Richard III, merely because Shakespeare wrote so effectively about him. Shakespeare moved in a different world from that of the historical, a world of creation rather than of recorded fact, and it is in this world that he is so supreme a master.

# Mr. Shakespeare, I Presume

by Diana Major Spencer From *Insights*, 1994

Could the plays known as Shakespeare's have been written by a rural, semi-literate, uneducated, wife-deserting, two-bit actor who spelled his name differently each of the six times he wrote it down? Could such a man know enough about Roman history, Italian geography, French grammar, and English court habits to create *Antony and Cleopatra*, *The Comedy of Errors*, and *Henry V*? Could he know enough about nobility and its tenuous relationship to royalty to create *King Lear* and *Macbeth*?

Are these questions even worth asking? Some very intelligent people think so. On the other hand, some very intelligent people think not. Never mind quibbles about how a line should be interpreted, or how many plays Shakespeare wrote and which ones, or which of the great tragedies reflected personal tragedies. The question of authorship is "The Shakespeare Controversy."

Since Mr. Cowell, quoting the deceased Dr. Wilmot, cast the first doubt about William of Stratford in an 1805 speech before the Ipswich Philological Society, nominees for the "real author" have included philosopher Sir Francis Bacon, playwright Christopher Marlowe, Queen Elizabeth I, Sir Walter Raleigh, and the earls of Derby, Rutland, Essex, and Oxford--among others.

The arguments evoke two premises: first, that the proven facts about the William Shakespeare who was christened at Holy Trinity Church in Stratford-upon-Avon on April 26, 1564 do not configure a man of sufficient nobility of thought and language to have written the plays; and, second, that the man from Stratford is nowhere concretely identified as the author of the plays. The name "Shakespeare"—in one of its spellings—appears on early quartos, but the man represented by the name may not be the one from Stratford.

One group of objections to the Stratford man follows from the absence of any record that he ever attended school—in Stratford or anywhere else. If he were uneducated, the arguments go, how could his vocabulary be twice as large as the learned Milton's? How could he know so much history, law, or philosophy? If he were a country bumpkin, how could he know so much of hawking, hounding, courtly manners, and daily habits of the nobility? How could he have traveled so much, learning about other nations of Europe in enough detail to make them the settings for his plays?

The assumptions of these arguments are that such rich and noble works as those attributed to a playwright using the name "Shakespeare" could have been written only by someone with certain characteristics, and that those characteristics could be distilled from the "facts" of his life. He would have to be noble; he would have to be well-educated; and so forth. On these grounds the strongest candidate to date is Edward de Vere, seventeenth earl of Oxford.

A debate that has endured its peaks and valleys, the controversy catapulted to center stage in 1984 with the publication of Charlton Ogburn's *The Mysterious William Shakespeare*. Ogburn, a former army intelligence officer, builds a strong case for Oxford—if one can hurdle the notions that the author wasn't Will Shakespeare, that literary works should be read autobiographically, and that literary creation is nothing more than reporting the facts of one's own life. "The Controversy" was laid to rest—temporarily, at least—by justices Blackmun, Brennan, and Stevens of the United States Supreme Court who, after hearing evidence from both sides in a mock trial conducted September 25, 1987 at American University in Washington, D.C., found in favor of the Bard of Avon. Hooray for our side!

# A Nest of Singing Birds

From *Insights*, 1992

Musical development was part of the intellectual and social movement that influenced all England during the Tudor Age. The same forces that produced writers like Sir Philip Sidney, Edmund Spenser, William Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, John Donne, and Francis Bacon also produced musicians of corresponding caliber. So numerous and prolific were these talented and imaginative men—men whose reputations were even in their own day firmly established and well founded—that they have been frequently and aptly referred to as a nest of singing birds.

One such figure was Thomas Tallis, whose music has officially accompanied the Anglican service since the days of Elizabeth I; another was his student, William Boyd, whose variety of religious and secular compositions won him international reputation.

Queen Elizabeth I, of course, provided an inspiration for the best efforts of Englishmen, whatever their aims and activities. For music, she was the ideal patroness. She was an accomplished performer on the virginal (forerunner to the piano), and she aided her favorite art immensely in every way possible, bestowing her favors on the singers in chapel and court and on the musicians in public and private theatrical performances. To the great composers of her time, she was particularly gracious and helpful.

Singing has been an integral part of English life for as long as we have any knowledge. Long before the music was written down, the timeless folk songs were a part of our Anglo-Saxon heritage. The madrigals and airs that are enjoyed each summer at the Utah Shakespearean Festival evolved from these traditions.

It was noted by Bishop Jewel in 1560 that sometimes at Paul's Cross there would be 6,000 people singing together, and before the sermon, the whole congregation always sang a psalm, together with the choir and organ. When that thundering unity of congregational chorus came in, "I was so transported there was no room left in my whole body, mind, or spirit for anything below divine and heavenly raptures."

Religious expression was likely the dominant musical motif of the Elizabethan period; however, the period also saw development of English stage music, with Morley, John Wilson, and Robert Johnson setting much of their music to the plays of Shakespeare. The masque, a semi-musical entertainment, reached a high degree of perfection at the court of James I, where the courtiers themselves were sometimes participants. An educated person of the time was expected to perform music more than just fairly well, and an inability in this area might elicit whispered comments regarding lack of genteel upbringing, not only in the ability to take one's part in a madrigal, but also in knowing the niceties of musical theory. Henry Peacham wrote in *The Compleat Gentleman* in 1662 that one of the fundamental qualities of a gentleman was to be able to "sing your part sure, and...to play the same upon your viol."

Outside the walls of court could be heard street songs, lighthearted catches, and ballads, all of which indicates that music was not confined to the cathedrals or court. We still have extant literally hundreds of ballads, street songs, and vendors' cries that were sung or hummed on the street and played with all their complicated variations on all levels of Elizabethan society.

Instruments of the period were as varied as the music and peoples, and the instrument and songbooks which remain in existence today are indicative of the high level of excellence enjoyed by the Elizabethans. Songbooks, mainly of part-songs for three, four, five, and six

voices exist today, as do books of dance music: corrantos, pavans, and galliards. Records from one wealthy family indicate the family owned forty musical instruments, including twelve viols, seven recorders, four lutes, five virginals, various brasses and woodwinds, and two “great organs.” To have use for such a great number of instruments implies a fairly large group of players resident with the family or staying with them as invited guests, and the players of the most popular instruments (lutes, virginals, and viols) would be playing from long tradition, at least back to King Henry VIII. In short, music was as necessary to the public and private existence of a Renaissance Englishman as any of the basic elements of life.

The Utah Shakespearean Festival musicians perform each summer on authentic replicas of many of these Renaissance instruments. The music they perform is authentic from the Elizabethan period, and the instruments are made available for audience inspection and learning.

# Actors in Shakespeare's Day

By Stephanie Chidester From *Insights*, 1994

The status of the actor in society has never been entirely stable but has fluctuated from the beginnings of the theatre to the present day. The ancient Greeks often considered actors as servants of Dionysus, and their performances were a sort of religious rite. Roman actors, often slaves, were seen as the scraps of society, only one step above gladiators. In medieval Europe, both the theatre and the actor, suppressed by the Catholic Church, were almost non-existent but gradually re-emerged in the form of the liturgy and, later, the Mystery plays. The actors of Shakespeare's age also saw fluctuations in reputation; actors were alternately classified as "vagabonds and sturdy beggars," as an act of Parliament in 1572 defined them, and as servants of noblemen.

As early as 1482, noblemen such as Richard, duke of Gloucester (later Richard III), the earl of Essex, and Lord Arundel kept acting companies among their retainers. But other than these select groups protected by nobles, actors lived lives of danger and instability because when they abandoned their respectable trades, they also left behind the comfort and protection of the trade guilds.

However, life soon became much more difficult for both of these classes of actors. In 1572, Parliament passed two acts which damaged thespians' social status. In the first one, the Queen forbade "the unlawful retaining of multitudes of unordinary servants by liveries, badges, and other signs and tokens (contrary to the good and ancient statutes and laws of this realm)" in order to "curb the power of local grandees" (Dennis Kay, *Shakespeare: His Life, Work, and Era* [New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1992], 88). One result of this was that some of the actors, now considered superfluous, were turned away.

To make matters even worse, these actors faced yet another impediment: the "Acte for the punishment of Vagabondes" (Kay, 88), in which actors were declared "vagabonds and masterless men and hence were subject to arrest and imprisonment" (Thomas Marc Parrott and Robert Hamilton Ball, *A Short View of Elizabethan Drama* [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1943], 46).

However, there were still nobles, such as the earl of Leicester and the earl of Sussex, who endorsed players; the protector would usually seek royal permission for these actors to perform in London or, less frequently, some other less prestigious town. Thus the actors were able to venture forth without fear of arrest. It is through these circumstances that Shakespeare ends up an actor in London.

There are many theories—guesses really—of how Shakespeare got into the theatre. He may have joined a group of strolling players, performed around the countryside, and eventually made it to London, the theatrical hub of Britain. Another theory suggests that he began as a schoolmaster, wrote a play (possibly *The Comedy of Errors*) and then decided to take it to London; or, alternately, he could have simply gone directly to that great city, with or without a play in hand, to try his luck.

An interesting speculation is that while he was young, Shakespeare might have participated in one of the cycles of Mystery plays in Stratford: "On one occasion the Stratford corporation laid out money for an entertainment at Pentecost. In 1583 they paid 13s 4d 'to Davi Jones and his company for his pastime at Whitsuntide.' Davi Jones had been married to Elizabeth, the daughter of Adrian Quiney, and after her death in 1579 he took as his wife a Hathaway, Frances. Was Shakespeare one of the youths who trimmed themselves for the Whitsun pastime?" (S. Schoenbaum, *William Shakespeare: A Compact Documentary Life* [New York: New American Library, 1977], 111).

But however he got into the theatre and to London, he had made a very definite impression on his competitors by 1592, when playwright Robert Greene attacked Shakespeare as both actor and author: “There is an upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his Tiger’s heart wrapt in a Player’s hide, supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of you: and . . . is in his own conceit the only Shake-scene in a country” (G. B. Harrison, *Introducing Shakespeare* [New York: Penguin Books, Inc., 1947], 1).

We don’t often think of Shakespeare as primarily an actor, perhaps because most of what we know of him comes from the plays he wrote rather than the parts he played. Nevertheless, he made much of his money as an actor and sharer in his company: “At least to start with, his status, his security derived more from his acting skill and his eye for business than from his pen” (Kay, 95). Had he been only a playwright, he would likely have died a poor man, as did Robert Greene: “In the autumn of 1592, Robert Greene, the most popular author of his generation, lay penniless and dying. . . . The players had grown rich on the products of his brain, and now he was deserted and alone” (Harrison, 1).

While Shakespeare made a career of acting, there are critics who might dispute his acting talent. For instance, almost a century after Shakespeare’s death, “an anonymous enthusiast of the stage . . . remarked . . . that ‘Shakespear . . . was a much better poet, than player’” (Schoenbaum, 201). However, Shakespeare could have been quite a good actor, and this statement would still be true. One sign of his skill as an actor is that he is mentioned in the same breath with Burbage and Kemp: “The accounts of the royal household for Mar 15 [1595] record payments to ‘William Kempe William Shakespeare & Richarde Burbage seruantes to the Lord Chamberlain’” (Kay, 174).

Another significant indication of his talent is the very fact that he played in London rather than touring other less lucrative towns. If players were to be legally retained by noblemen, they had to prove they could act, and one means of demonstrating their legitimacy was playing at court for Queen Elizabeth. The more skilled companies obtained the queen’s favor and were granted permission to remain in London.

Not all companies, however, were so fortunate: “Sussex’s men may not have been quite up to the transition from rural inn-yards to the more demanding circumstances of court performance. Just before the Christmas season of 1574, for example, they were inspected (‘perused’) by officials of the Revels Office, with a view to being permitted to perform before the queen; but they did not perform” (Kay, 90). Shakespeare and his company, on the other hand, performed successfully in London from the early 1590s until 1611. It would be a mistake to classify William Shakespeare as only a playwright, even the greatest playwright of the English-speaking world; he was also “an actor, a sharer, a member of a company” (Kay, 95), obligations that were extremely relevant to his plays. As a man of the theatre writing for a company, he knew what would work on stage and what would not and was able to make his plays practical as well as brilliant. And perhaps more importantly, his theatrical experience must have taught him much about the human experience, about everyday lives and roles, just as his plays show us that “All the world’s a stage, / And all the men and women merely players” (*As You Like It*, 2.7.149–50).

# Shakespeare's Audience: A Very Motley Crowd

From *Insights*, 1992

When Shakespeare peeped through the curtain at the audience gathered to hear his first play, he looked upon a very motley crowd. The pit was filled with men and boys. The galleries contained a fair proportion of women, some not too respectable. In the boxes were a few gentlemen from the royal courts, and in the lords' box or perhaps sitting on the stage was a group of extravagantly dressed gentlemen of fashion. Vendors of nuts and fruits moved about through the crowd. The gallants were smoking; the apprentices in the pit were exchanging rude witticisms with the painted ladies.

When Shakespeare addressed his audience directly, he did so in terms of gentle courtesy or pleasant raillery. In *Hamlet*, however, he does let fall the opinion that the groundlings (those on the ground, the cheapest seats) were "for the most part capable of nothing but dumb shows and noise." His recollections of the pit of the Globe may have added vigor to his ridicule of the Roman mob in *Julius Caesar*.

On the other hand, the theatre was a popular institution, and the audience was representative of all classes of London life. Admission to standing room in the pit was a penny, and an additional penny or two secured a seat in the galleries. For seats in the boxes or for stools on the stage, still more was charged, up to sixpence or half a crown.

Attendance at the theatres was astonishingly large. There were often five or six theatres giving daily performances, which would mean that out of a city of one hundred thousand inhabitants, thirty thousand or more spectators each week attended the theatre. When we remember that a large class of the population disapproved of the theatre, and that women of respectability were not frequent patrons of the public playhouses, this attendance is remarkable.

Arrangements for the comfort of the spectators were meager, and spectators were often disorderly. Playbills seem to have been posted all about town and in the theatre, and the title of the piece was announced on the stage. These bills contained no lists of actors, and there were no programs, ushers, or tickets. There was usually one door for the audience, where the admission fee was deposited in a box carefully watched by the money taker, and additional sums were required at entrance to the galleries or boxes. When the three o'clock trumpets announced the beginning of a performance, the assembled audience had been amusing itself by eating, drinking, smoking, and playing cards, and they sometimes continued these occupations during a performance. Pickpockets were frequent, and, if caught, were tied to a post on the stage. Disturbances were not infrequent, sometimes resulting in general rioting.

The Elizabethan audience was fond of unusual spectacle and brutal physical suffering. They liked battles and murders, processions and fireworks, ghosts and insanity. They expected comedy to abound in beatings, and tragedy in deaths. While the audience at the Globe expected some of these sensations and physical horrors, they did not come primarily for these. (Real blood and torture were available nearby at the bear baitings, and public executions were not uncommon.) Actually, there were very few public entertainments offering as little brutality as did the theatre.

Elizabethans attended the public playhouses for learning. They attended for romance, imagination, idealism, and art; the audience was not without refinement, and those looking for food for the imagination had nowhere to go but to the playhouse. There were no newspapers, no



magazines, almost no novels, and only a few cheap books; theatre filled the desire for story discussion among people lacking other educational and cultural opportunities.

The most remarkable case of Shakespeare's theatre filling an educational need is probably that of English history. The growth of national patriotism culminating in the English victory over the Spanish Armada gave dramatists a chance to use the historical material, and for the fifteen years from the Armada to the death of Elizabeth, the stage was deluged with plays based on the events of English chronicles, and familiarity with English history became a cultural asset of the London crowd,

Law was a second area where the Elizabethan public seems to have been fairly well informed, and successful dramatists realized the influence that the great development of civil law in the sixteenth century exercised upon the daily life of the London citizen. In this area, as in others, the dramatists did not hesitate to cultivate the cultural background of their audience whenever opportunity offered, and the ignorance of the multitude did not prevent it from taking an interest in new information and from offering a receptive hearing to the accumulated lore of lawyers, historians, humanists, and playwrights.

The audience was used to the spoken word, and soon became trained in blank verse, delighting in monologues, debates, puns, metaphors, stump speakers, and sonorous declamation. The public was accustomed to the acting of the old religious dramas, and the new acting in which the spoken words were listened to caught on rapidly. The new poetry and the great actors who recited it found a sensitive audience. There were many moments during a play when spectacle, brutality, and action were all forgotten, and the audience fed only on the words. Shakespeare and his contemporaries may be deemed fortunate in having an audience essentially attentive, eager for the newly unlocked storehouse of secular story, and possessing the sophistication and interest to be fed richly by the excitements and levities on the stage.

# Shakespearean Snapshots

From *Insights*, 2002

By Ace G. Pilkington

It is hard to get from the facts of Shakespeare's life to any sense of what it must have been like to have lived it. He was born in 1564 in Stratford-on-Avon and died there in 1616. The day of his birth is not certain, but it may have been the same as the day of his death—April 23—if he was baptized, as was usual at the time, three days after he was born. He married Anne Hathaway in the winter of 1582–83, when he was eighteen and she was twenty-six. He became the father of three children. The first was Susannah, who was born around May 23, close enough to the date of the wedding to suggest that the marriage was not entirely voluntary. Shakespeare's twins, Hamnet and Judith, were baptized on February 2, 1585. Hamnet died of unknown causes (at least unknown by us at this distance in time) in 1596. Shakespeare's career as actor, theatre owner, manager, and, of course, playwright began in the vicinity of 1590 and continued for the rest of his life, though there are clear indications that he spent more and more time in Stratford and less and less in London from 1611 on. His work in the theatre made him wealthy, and his extraordinary plays brought him a measure of fame, though nothing like what he deserved or would posthumously receive.

It's hard to get even the briefest sense of what Shakespeare's life was like from such information. It is probably impossible ever to know what Shakespeare thought or felt, but maybe we can get closer to what he saw and heard and even smelled. Perhaps some snapshots—little close-ups—might help to bring us nearer to the world in which Shakespeare lived if not quite to the life he lived in that world. In Shakespeare's youth, chimneys were a new thing. Before that, smoke was left to find its way out through a hole in the roof, often a thatched roof, and there were even some who maintained that this smoky atmosphere was better than the newfangled fresh air that chimneys made possible—along with a greater division of rooms and more privacy.

In the year of Shakespeare's birth, Stratford had more trees than houses—"upwards of 400 houses as well as 1,000 elms and forty ashes" (Peter Thomson, *Shakespeare's Professional Career* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992], 1). Peter Levi says, "The town was so full of elm trees that it must have looked and sounded like a woodland settlement. For example, Mr. Gibbs's house on Rothermarket had twelve elms in the garden and six in front of the door. Thomas Attford on Ely Street had another twelve. The town boundaries were marked by elms or groups of elms (*The Life and Times of William Shakespeare* [New York: Wings Books, 1988], 7). Shakespeare's "Bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang" becomes a far more majestic image with the picture of Stratford's elms in mind. And the birds themselves had a sound which modern ears no longer have a chance to enjoy. "We must realize that it was ordinary for . . . Shakespeare to hear a dawn chorus of many hundreds of birds at once. . . . as a young man thirty years ago I have heard a deafening dawn chorus in the wooded Chilterns, on Shakespeare's road to London" (Levi 10).

Exactly what Shakespeare's road to London may have been or at least how he first made his way there and became an actor is much debated. He might have been a schoolmaster or fifty other things, but he may well have started out as he ended up—as a player. We can then, in John Southworth's words, "Picture a sixteen-year-old lad on a cart, growing year by year into manhood, journeying out of the Arden of his childhood into ever more unfamiliar, distant regions, travelling ill-made roads in all weathers, sleeping in inns, hearing and memorising strange new dialects and forms of speech, meeting with every possible type and character of person; learning, most of all perhaps, from the audiences to which he played in guildhalls and inns" (*Shakespeare the Player: A Life in the Theatre* [Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing Limited, 2000], 30). At some time in his life—in fact, many times—Shakespeare must have known theatrical tours very like that.

In London itself, the new Globe, the best theatre in (or rather just outside of) the city, was in an area with a large number of prisons and an unpleasant smell. “Garbage had preceded actors on the marshy land where the new playhouse was erected: ‘flanked with a ditch and forced out of a marsh’, according to Ben Jonson. Its cost . . . included the provision of heavy piles for the foundation, and a whole network of ditches in which the water rose and fell with the tidal Thames” (Garry O’Connor, *William Shakespeare: A Popular Life* [New York: Applause Books, 2000], 161). The playgoers came by water, and the Globe, the Rose, and the Swan “drew 3,000 or 4,000 people in boats across the Thames every day” (161). Peter Levi says of Shakespeare’s London, “The noise, the crowds, the animals and their droppings, the glimpses of grandeur and the amazing squalor of the poor, were beyond modern imagination” (49).

England was a place of fear and glory. Public executions were public entertainments. Severed heads decayed on city walls. Francis Bacon, whom Will Durant calls “the most powerful and influential intellect of his time” (*Heroes of History: A Brief History of Civilization from Ancient Times to the Dawn of the Modern Age* [New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001], 327), had been “one of the persons commissioned to question prisoners under torture” in the 1580s (Levi 4). The opportune moment when Shakespeare became the most successful of playwrights was the destruction of Thomas Kyd, “who broke under torture and was never the same again,” and the death of Christopher Marlowe in a tavern brawl which was the result of plot and counterplot—a struggle, very probably, between Lord Burghley and Walter Raleigh (Levi 48). Shakespeare, who must have known the rumors and may have known the truth, cannot have helped shuddering at such monstrous good fortune. Still, all of the sights, smells, and terrors, from the birdsongs to the screams of torture, from the muddy tides to the ties of blood, became not only the textures and tonalities of Shakespeare’s life, but also the information and inspiration behind his plays.

# Ghosts, Witches, and Shakespeare

By Howard Waters

From *Insights*, 2006

Some time in the mid 1580s, young Will Shakespeare, for reasons not entirely clear to us, left his home, his wife, and his family in Stratford and set off for London. It was a time when Elizabeth, “la plus fine femme du monde,” as Henry III of France called her, had occupied the throne of England for over twenty-five years. The tragedy of Mary Stuart was past; the ordeal of Essex was in the future. Sir Francis Drake’s neutralization of the Spanish Armada was pending and rumors of war or invasion blew in from all the great ports.

What could have been more exciting for a young man from the country, one who was already more than half in love with words, than to be headed for London!

It was an exciting and frightening time, when the seven gates of London led to a maze of streets, narrow and dirty, crowded with tradesmen, carts, coaches, and all manner of humanity. Young Will would have seen the moated Tower of London, looking almost like an island apart. There was London Bridge crowded with tenements and at the southern end a cluster of traitors’ heads impaled on poles. At Tyburn thieves and murderers dangled, at Limehouse pirates were trussed up at low tide and left to wait for the water to rise over them. At Tower Hill the headsman’s axe flashed regularly, while for the vagabonds there were the whipping posts, and for the beggars there were the stocks. Such was the London of the workaday world, and young Will was undoubtedly mentally filing away details of what he saw, heard, and smelled.

Elizabethan people in general were an emotional lot and the ferocity of their entertainment reflected that fact. Bear-baiting, for example, was a highly popular spectator sport, and the structure where they were generally held was not unlike the theatres of the day. A bear was chained to a stake in the center of the pit, and a pack of large dogs was turned loose to bait, or fight, him. The bear eventually tired (fortunately for the remaining dogs!), and, well, you can figure the rest out for yourself. Then there were the public hangings, whippings, or drawing and quarterings for an afternoon’s entertainment. So, the violence in some of Shakespeare’s plays was clearly directed at an audience that reveled in it. Imagine the effect of having an actor pretend to bite off his own tongue and spit a chunk of raw liver that he had carefully packed in his jaw into the faces of the groundlings!

Despite the progressing enlightenment of the Renaissance, superstition was still rampant among Elizabethan Londoners, and a belief in such things as astrology was common (Ralph P. Boas and Barbara M. Hahna, “The Age of Shakespeare,” *Social Backgrounds of English Literature*, [Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1931] 93). Through the position of stars many Elizabethans believed that coming events could be foretold even to the extent of mapping out a person’s entire life.

Where witches and ghosts were concerned, it was commonly accepted that they existed and the person who scoffed at them was considered foolish, or even likely to be cursed. Consider the fact that Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* was supposedly cursed due to the playwright’s having given away a few more of the secrets of witchcraft than the weird sisters may have approved of. For a time, productions experienced an uncanny assortment of mishaps and injuries. Even today, it is often considered bad luck for members of the cast and crew to mention the name of the production, simply referred to as the Scottish Play. In preaching a sermon, Bishop Jewel warned the Queen: “It may please your Grace to understand that witches and sorcerers within these last few years are marvelously increased. Your Grace’s

subjects pine away, even unto death; their color fadeth; their flesh rotteth; their speech is benumbed; their senses bereft” (Walter Bromberg, “Witchcraft and Psychotherapy”, *The Mind of Man* [New York: Harper Torchbooks 1954], 54).

Ghosts were recognized by the Elizabethans in three basic varieties: the vision or purely subjective ghost, the authentic ghost who has died without opportunity of repentance, and the false ghost which is capable of many types of manifestations (Boas and Hahn). When a ghost was confronted, either in reality or in a Shakespearean play, some obvious discrimination was called for (and still is). Critics still do not always agree on which of these three types haunts the pages of *Julius Caesar*, *Macbeth*, *Richard III*, or *Hamlet*, or, in some cases, why they are necessary to the plot at all. After all, Shakespeare’s ghosts are a capricious lot, making themselves visible or invisible as they please. In *Richard III* there are no fewer than eleven ghosts on the stage who are visible only to Richard and Richmond. In *Macbeth* the ghost of Banquo repeatedly appears to Macbeth in crowded rooms but is visible only to him. In *Hamlet*, the ghost appears to several people on the castle battlements but only to Hamlet in his mother’s bedchamber. In the words of E.H. Seymour: “If we judge by sheer reason, no doubt we must banish ghosts from the stage altogether, but if we regulate our fancy by the laws of superstition, we shall find that spectres are privileged to be visible to whom they will (E.H. Seymour “Remarks, Critical, Conjectural, and Explanatory on Shakespeare” in *Macbeth A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare* [New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1963] 211).

Shakespeare’s audiences, and his plays, were the products of their culture. Since the validity of any literary work can best be judged by its public acceptance, not to mention its lasting power, it seems that Shakespeare’s ghosts and witches were, and are, enormously popular. If modern audiences and critics find themselves a bit skeptical, then they might consider bringing along a supply of Coleridge’s “willing suspension of disbelief.” Elizabethans simply had no need of it.

# Shakespeare's Day: What They Wore

The clothing which actors wear to perform a play is called a costume, to distinguish it from everyday clothing. In Shakespeare's time, acting companies spent almost as much on costumes as television series do today.

The costumes for shows in England were so expensive that visitors from France were a little envious. Kings and queens on the stage were almost as well dressed as kings and queens in real life.

Where did the acting companies get their clothes? Literally, "off the rack" and from used clothing sellers. Wealthy middle class people would often give their servants old clothes that they didn't want to wear any more, or would leave their clothes to the servants when they died. Since clothing was very expensive, people wore it as long as possible and passed it on from one person to another without being ashamed of wearing hand-me-downs. However, since servants were of a lower class than their employers, they weren't allowed to wear rich fabrics, and would sell these clothes to acting companies, who were allowed to wear what they wanted in performance.

A rich nobleman like Count Paris or a wealthy young man like Romeo would wear a doublet, possibly of velvet, and it might have gold embroidery. Juliet and Lady Capulet would have worn taffeta, silk, gold, or satin gowns, and everybody would have had hats, gloves, ruffs (an elaborate collar), gloves, stockings, and shoes equally elaborate.

For a play like *Romeo and Juliet*, which was set in a European country at about the same time Shakespeare wrote it, Elizabethan everyday clothes would have been fine—the audience would have been happy, and they would have been authentic for the play. However, since there were no costume shops who could make clothing suitable for, say, medieval Denmark for *Hamlet*, or ancient Rome for *Julius Caesar*, or Oberon and Titania's forest for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, these productions often looked slightly strange—can you imagine fairies in full Elizabethan collars and skirts? How would they move?

Today's audiences want costumes to be authentic, so that they can believe in the world of the play. However, *Romeo and Juliet* was recently set on Verona Beach, with very up-to-date clothes indeed; and about thirty years ago, *West Side Story*, an updated musical version of the *Romeo and Juliet* tale, was set in the Puerto Rican section of New York City.

**Activity:** Discuss what the affect of wearing "special" clothes is—to church, or to a party. Do you feel different? Do you act different? How many kinds of wardrobes do you have? School, play, best? Juliet and Romeo would have had only one type of clothing each, no matter how nice it was.

**Activity:** Perform a scene from the play in your everyday clothes, and then in more formal clothes. Ask the participants and the spectators to describe the differences between the two performances.

# About the Play

It was about 100 years after the death of the first Roman dictator Julius Caesar that the great historian Plutarch (46–120 CE) wrote a biography. Of his examination Plutarch said, “It is not histories I am writing, but lives; and in the most glorious deeds there is not always an indication of virtue of vice, indeed a small thing like a phrase or a jest often makes a greater revelation of a character than battles where thousands die” Plutarch (*Life of Alexander/Life of Julius Caesar, Parallel Lives*, [translated by E.L. Bowie]). And it was probably this source, translated from Greek to French and French to English in 1579 by Thomas North, which fell into the hands of the ‘upstart crow’ playwright William Shakespeare.

It may have been Shakespeare’s own worries about the future of his own country that prompted him to tackle *Julius Caesar* for his next play in 1599. After all, by that year Queen Elizabeth I had been on the throne forty-one years. Though she was growing weak in body, her power, especially after the glorious defeat of the Spanish Armada, had never been greater. She was very popular with her people, who even established a religious cult devoted to her. Yet all of England knew that she had continually refused to name an heir to her throne. Many feared a return to civil war after her death. To Shakespeare such a war may have been reminiscent of the strife caused by Caesar’s unexpected assassination.

History had proved that though Brutus and the other conspirators believed that Caesar’s death would save the republic from tyrannical leadership, it had the reverse affect. It was only two years after the deaths of Caesar, Cassius, Brutus, and Mark Antony, that Octavian, Caesar’s grand nephew, was crowned as the first emperor of Rome, Caesar Augustus. It must have seemed likely that Elizabeth’s own removal from the throne, the end of her “Golden Age,” could have similar dictatorial backsliding consequences on a nation that was already beginning to feel the stirrings of a republican revolution that would come forty years later. (Auspiciously future Lord Protectorate Oliver Cromwell was born in 1599.)

This time of political transition also marked a shift in Shakespeare’s writing. *Julius Caesar* and *Romeo and Juliet* are among the first of his great tragedies written from 1599 to 1608. *Julius Caesar* is the most cerebral of these tragedies. The audience is not particularly sympathetic to the murdered Caesar, as he is hardly alive on stage long enough to seem a fully developed character. In his few scenes he appears as a charming, affable, if somewhat big-headed military leader, with a boyish sense of invincibility. With such a brief introduction it is difficult for the audience to take the threat of his overthrow of the republic very seriously. As the author of an 1817 article stated, “We do not much admire the representation here given of Julius Caesar, nor do we think it answers to the portrait given of him in his Commentaries. He makes several vapouring and rather pedantic speeches, and does nothing” (Hazlitt, Williams, *Characters of Shakespeare’s Plays* [C.H. Reynell: London] 1817).

The lack of action and pensive attitude of the first half of the play perfectly set up the furious scenes of revolt and battle displayed in the second half. This opposition makes clear Shakespeare’s feelings about the dangerous impact of the deaths of powerful leaders.

And yet, Caesar’s lack of action and scant appearance in on stage action shift the audience’s focus to the dealings of Brutus and Cassius. As Brutus cries to the heavens near the end of the play, “O Julius Caesar, thou art mighty yet!” (5.4.100) As the action of the play moves forward the audience the effects of their murderous decision on themselves and also for the Rome they claim to love.

The play has been popular throughout the 400 years since its initial performance it has been performed by casts of hundreds, as well as by school children around the world. Its universal themes of loyalty, flattery, political necessity, and fate continue to strike chords in the hearts of audiences around the world and has lent itself to production alterations like all female casts, relocating the action into updated political settings, and has also been adapted to the screen with such major film stars as Charlton Heston, John Gielgud, and Marlon Brando.



# Synopsis

Julius Caesar, returning victorious to Rome from foreign wars, is escorted to the Capitol by enthusiastic citizens for a public celebration. On the way, he is warned by a soothsayer to “beware the Ides of March.” At the celebration, the citizens, through Mark Antony, offer Caesar the crown. Three times he refuses. However, a group of conspirators, headed by Cassius, is disturbed by the power Caesar has gained and the idea that he might seize total power. To help their cause, they attempt to persuade Brutus, a good friend of Caesar and a man well-known for his honesty, that the welfare of Rome demands Caesar’s death.

That night, a tormented Brutus debates with himself whether to join the conspiracy. His fear that Rome may lose its freedom wins out over his admiration for Caesar, and at last he agrees to join with Cassius and the others to assassinate Caesar the next day.

The next morning is March 15, the Ides of March, and Calphurnia, Caesar’s wife, complains that she has had frightful dreams and has heard of evil omens. She urges her husband to avoid danger and stay home from the senate that day. After arguing that he will appear frightened or ignoble by staying home, Caesar finally gives into his wife and consents to staying with her. The conspirators, however, come to his house, acting as friends and supporters, and succeed in inducing him to accompany them, instead, to the Capitol.

In the Capitol, at the foot of the statue of Caesar’s old enemy, Pompey, the conspirators surround Caesar on the pretext of discussing business with him—and each, in turn, stabs him. Seeing Brutus’s thrust, Caesar exclaims “et tu, Brute” (you too, Brutus) and dies. Mark Antony, Caesar’s friend, confronts the conspirators; and they seem to convince him that their actions were right, and they agree that Antony may speak at the funeral, as long as he does not condemn the conspirators.

Brutus speaks first at the funeral and says that love of Rome alone made the murder necessary, a sentiment which is hailed with enthusiasm by the populace. Antony follows, praising Caesar, while calling Brutus and the conspirators “honorable men.” He so cleverly twists the argument, without blaming the conspirators, that the crowd, a moment before cheering Brutus, turns in anger against the conspirators, who are forced to flee from the city. Indeed things become so chaotic that a poet named Cinna, who had nothing to do with Caesar’s death, is killed by the mob just because his name is the same as one of the conspirators.

In Rome, the ruling triumvirate of Antony, Octavius, and Lepidus formed after Caesar’s death plot revenge and organize a military force to fight the armies of Brutus and Cassius. The opposing armies gather on the battlefield of Philippi.

Meanwhile, the relationship between Cassius and Brutus has deteriorated into an open quarrel. After the argument is settled, Brutus confides to Cassius that his wife, Portia, has committed suicide. Later that night, unable to sleep, Brutus is stunned to see Caesar’s ghost, who warns that he will meet him again at the battlefield of Philippi.

That morning the armies meet and the forces of the triumvirate are victorious. Unwilling to endure defeat and dishonor, both Cassius and Brutus kill themselves. Antony vows to give Brutus the funeral of a noble Roman and calls him “the noblest Roman of them all,” since he was the only conspirator whose motive was not envy of the powerful Caesar.

# Characters

**Julius Caesar:** A Roman aristocrat, general, and politician, Julius Caesar gained almost unlimited power from military victories. He had been made dictator before the play started, but he wanted to be made king so he could designate his heir. He is assassinated midway through the play, but his ghost appears later to Brutus.

**Octavius Caesar:** One of the triumvirs who rule following the death of Julius Caesar, Octavius, with Antony, leads the army that defeats Cassius and Brutus at Philippi.

**Mark Antony:** A young kinsman of Caesar, Mark Antony is fiercely loyal to him. A skilled orator who excites the mob at Caesar's funeral, he is one of the triumvirs who rule after Caesar's death.

**M. Aemilius Lepidus:** One of the triumvirs who rule following the death of Julius Caesar, Lepidus is weak and Antony uses him essentially to run errands.

**Cicero:** A senator

**Publius:** A senator

**Popilius Lena:** A senator

**Marcus Brutus:** A powerful orator and a well-known and powerful senator, Marcus Brutus is a close friend of Julius Caesar. He is convinced by the other conspirators to join their plot because they believe the future of Rome is at stake. After the assassination, he becomes one of the military leaders opposing the triumvirate, but, when he believes defeat is certain, he kills himself.

**Cassius:** Brother-in-law to Brutus, Cassius is a capable soldier and the leader of the conspirators. He, too, leads the opposing armies with Brutus and kills himself when he believes defeat is certain.

**Casca:** A conspirator, the first to stab Caesar

**Trebonius:** A conspirator

**Caius Ligarius:** A conspirator

**Decius Brutus:** A conspirator

**Metellus Cimber:** A conspirator

**Cinna:** A conspirator

**Flavius:** A tribune

**Murellus:** A tribune

**Artemidorus of Cnidos:** A teacher of rhetoric, Artemidorus attempts to warn Caesar of the plot, but Caesar ignores him.

**Soothsayer:** Twice, the soothsayer warns Caesar of the Ides of March.

**Cinna the Poet:** Only because he has the same name as one of the conspirators, Cinna the Poet is murdered by the riotous mob intent on avenging Caesar's death.

**Another Poet**

**Lucilius:** A friend of Brutus and Cassius

**Titinius:** A friend of Brutus and Cassius

**Messala:** A friend of Brutus and Cassius

**Young Cato:** A friend of Brutus and Cassius

**Volumnius:** A friend of Brutus and Cassius

**Flavius:** A friend of Brutus and Cassius

**Varrus:** A servant of Brutus

**Clitus:** A servant of Brutus

**Claudio:** A servant of Brutus

**Strato:** A servant of Brutus

**Lucius:** A servant of Brutus

**Dardanius:** A servant of Brutus

**Pindarus:** A servant of Cassius

**Calphurnia:** Julius Caesar's wife, Calphurnia unsuccessfully urges her husband to stay at home on the day of the assassination because of the many nightmares and bad omens she has experienced during the previous night.

**Portia:** Brutus's wife, Portia is loyal to her husband, but she commits suicide by "swallowing fire" when she realizes that her husband's fortunes are doomed.

# Hail, Caesar!

Excerpted from an article by Marleen Flory

So Superhuman did Gaius Julius Caesar (100 44 B.C.) seem to later generations that a legend arose that he had been born through an incision in his mother's body—that is, a “Caesarian section,” which, with the name of the month of “July,” is Julius Caesar's legacy to the English language.

An undistinguished boyhood followed his legendary birth: Caesar apparently preferred parties to politics and dice to diplomacy. Few saw the ruthless character beneath his frivolous exterior. Cicero, the great Roman orator, was perhaps the first to see tyrannical purposes in Caesar's plans, although at times even he doubted: “When I look at his hair so artfully arranged, I cannot believe he is the sort of man to overthrow the Roman state.”

First in Spain, then Gaul and Britain, and finally in the civil wars that gave him sole power, Caesar proved himself the greatest general Rome ever had. His main assets were his own boldness and speed and the loyalty of his men, whose hardships he insisted on sharing and who, in turn, revered him. Accounts of Caesar's bravery, which he surely did little to discourage, approached the mythical. Once, for instance, he supposedly escaped a surprise attack by leaping into the sea and swimming to a nearby ship—while carrying above the water diplomatic documents and dragging his cloak in his teeth so the enemy couldn't take it as a trophy.

Caesar's military ability was matched only by his verbal skill. Absent from Rome for nine years while fighting in Gaul, he sent regular reports from the front. His detailed and sometimes thrilling commentaries kept the Romans informed and, not coincidentally, kept his name before them. Caesar may not have invented political propaganda, but he certainly knew how to use it; no modern politician has come up with a better slogan than “I came. I saw. I conquered.”

The myth of Caesar also included his superhuman energy: He could ride all night and fight all day, his proponents claimed, while his detractors pointed to a similar vitality in the bedroom. Even to the pleasure-loving Romans, Caesar seemed highly sexed. Women threw themselves at him (Cleopatra is said to have had herself smuggled into his presence rolled up in a rug), and friends often joked that once Caesar came to power he would make polygamy legal—for Caesar. He was, in the words of one Roman, “every woman's husband”; yet he was also known as the “only sober man who ever tired to wreck the Roman constitution,” for drink was not among his vices.

Power was, however, and Caesar could not or would not hide the pleasure he took in it; nor would he credit threats of assassination at the hands of senators whose political ambitions he had cut off. At a dinner party one evening, when discussion turned to the ideal death, he said “swift and unexpected.” He got his wish the next day, the Ides of March, when sixty members of the senate struggled with one another to thrust their daggers into his body.

# *Julius Caesar: The Concept of Honor*

By Stephanie Chidester

From Souvenir Program, 1992

The concept of honor pervades almost every action in *Julius Caesar*, especially those of that “honorable man” Brutus. Speaking of the “basic paradox in Brutus’s motive,” Norman Council points out that “he is so firmly committed to honour that although typically, for a sixteenth-century man of honor, prepared to risk death for its sake, he also assumes that his honorable instincts will inevitably enable him to serve ‘the general good’” (*When Honour’s at the Stake: Ideas of Honour in Shakespeare’s Plays* [New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1973], 61).

It might be more accurate to say that Brutus is so firmly committed to himself and so proud of his honor that he cannot clearly see the “general good,” cannot even see beyond his desire to appear honorable. And it is this vain (in two senses of that word) approach to honor which leads to Brutus’s downfall.

Brutus’s self-absorption is evident practically from the moment he begins to speak. He explains to Cassius: “Nor construe any further my neglect / Than that poor Brutus, with himself at war, / Forgets the shows of love to other men” (*The Folger Library General Reader’s Shakespeare: Julius Caesar*, eds. Louis B. Wright and Virginia A. LaMar [New York: Washington Square Press, 1959], 1.2.50-2). There are indications that Brutus’s introspections have their root in a point of honor—Caesar’s ambitions; he exclaims “What means this shouting? I do fear the people / Choose Caesar for their king” (1.2.84-5), and later in the same scene, he says of Caesar, “Brutus had rather be a villager / Than to repute himself a son of Rome / Under these hard conditions as this time / Is like to lay upon us” (178-81).

Cassius recognizes Brutus’s vanity, and he is able to manipulate his friend into joining the somewhat questionable conspiracy by providing him with a large mirror—that of flattery—in which to admire his honorable figure. Cassius soliloquizes, “Well, Brutus, thou art noble; yet I see / Thy honorable mettle may be wrought / From that it is disposed. Therefore it is meet / That noble minds keep ever with their likes; / For who so firm that cannot be seduced?” (1.2.313-17).

Brutus will not admit to himself that his motives are in any way personal; indeed, he is quick to squelch any such idea. He declares that he is not envious of Caesar at 1.2.168-9, and he makes justifications to himself at 2.1.10-12: “For my part, / I know no personal cause to spurn at him, / But for the general.” Even as he dies, he claims, “My heart doth joy that yet in all my life / I found no man but he was true to me” (5.5.38-9). However much he may make this assertion, he has used Caesar’s supposed betrayal of himself and of his fellow Romans as an excuse for the assassination. And if Brutus’s statement is accurate and Caesar has been true to him, he has himself been untrue and his conduct dishonorable to Caesar.

Cassius’s arguments (and Brutus’s assurances at 1.2.178-81) explicitly indicate that if Brutus is subservient to a dishonorable or cowardly man (as Cassius deems Caesar to be), he is himself dishonored: “He doth bestride the narrow world / Like a Colossus, and we petty men / Walk under his huge legs and peep about / To find ourselves dishonorable graves (1.2.141-44). This is, of course, the best persuasion Cassius could use; according to this argument, Brutus must join the conspiracy if he is to maintain his honor.

Unfortunately for Cassius, however, Brutus is not so malleable that he will passively take orders from the other assassins. After he joins their ranks, Brutus actually starts to manipulate Cassius with his misguided honor, asserting himself and forcing his honorable—but bad—advice upon Cassius. As a result, Antony is left alive and is allowed to speak to the mob after Caesar’s death, and the conspirators lose the decisive battle against Octavius and Antony.

In Norman Council’s words, “Ambition . . . is the most enticing vice to which the honorable man is subject” (20). Brutus’s pride in his honor, his ambition to be honorable, is the weakness that leads to his downfall and to the defeat of the conspirators.

# *Julius Caesar: A Play of Paradoxes*

By Kelli Frost

From *Midsummer Magazine*, 1992

It can be argued that Julius Caesar was a despot, a tyrant, and a manipulative dictator, but for all the criticism heaped upon this ruler, he remains a character central to history and theatre for centuries, remembered as “the noblest Roman of them all.” But *Julius Caesar* the play is about several men whose actions may be deemed both good and evil, honest and dishonest. That is the paradox of this play and its characters, because a good man (Brutus) can do great harm from the best possible motives.

Julius Caesar was unquestionably one of the most remarkable men who ever lived. An astute politician, Caesar surrounded himself with men who sought power and control for the good of Rome. Caesar’s military genius left him the lone survivor of the former ruling triumvirate. His military prowess allowed him to carve a path through the Roman empire, leaving all opposing rulers dead and Caesar a popular and powerful hero. A master of manipulation, Caesar maintained his demigod status among the Roman citizenry by bribing them with gifts of land and money.

Undoubtedly, Caesar had his faults. Those mentioned in Shakespeare’s play include Caesar’s deafness in one ear, his proclivity to epilepsy and fevers, many superstitions, an inability to swim, and implications that the childless, yet promiscuous, Caesar was sterile. (Some historians argue that Brutus was actually an illegitimate son of Caesar’s.) Nevertheless, for each of his faults, Caesar possessed an offsetting virtue. He put the public good above his personal interest, he dealt fairly with those who served him, he was generous in all he owned, and he loved people. Most of all, he loved and trusted Brutus, an “honorable man” who finds himself caught in the political crossfire.

## **Political Dilemma and Personal Tragedy**

Shakespeare uses both political dilemma and personal tragedy as motifs in *Julius Caesar*. He also employs not one but two protagonists in this play—Caesar and Brutus. When we first see Brutus, he is merely an observant senator assessing the new-found popularity of an ambitious Caesar. But Brutus falls prey to the suggestion by Cassius that Rome would be better off without Caesar at the helm. “Think of the world,” invokes Cassius. Their inflated observations suggest that Rome stands to fall at the hands of Caesar.

And it is at the hand of Cassius that both Caesar and Brutus fall prey to their own destiny, which is reserved for great men who are subject to flattery. Cassius tells Brutus “since you cannot see yourself / . . . I, your glass / will modestly discover to yourself / That of yourself which you yet know not of.” Brutus listens to talk of his own merits, his honor and greatness, and his potential as a ruler of Rome. Unfortunately, Brutus believes Cassius’s flattery. Although Brutus strives to be an honest and moral statesman, the statesman can seldom be honest and moral and still be right. In Brutus’s case, the statesman ends up both wrong and dead, however honorable.

Caesar becomes a victim of his own hubris, as he comes to believe the rumors that he is indestructible, worthy of honor, and loved by all. Indeed, he tells the Senate members that “Caesar doth not wrong.” Decius’s flattery propels Caesar’s personal tragedy into reality (“from you great Rome shall suck reviving blood”). Decius’s flattery becomes a lie, when he strikes at Caesar’s ambitious sense, telling him the Senate offers Caesar the crown. Caesar believes he is to be dictator for life. That one lie sets in motion the conspirators’ plot.

Caesar’s fall begins as he acts upon his tragic flaw. He laughs publicly at the soothsayer’s warning (“he is a dreamer”), waves away Artimedorus’s letter telling of the conspiracy (“what, is the fellow mad?”), and refuses to heed the concern of his wife’s unnerving dream (“how foolish

do your fears seem now, Calpurnia”). History may have been written differently had Caesar heeded any one of these warnings regarding his visit to the Senate on March 15. But history is made by men’s actions, not their ideals.

### Questions and Flattery

Mark Antony speaks publicly of Caesar’s ideals, along with his own and those of all Rome. The center point in the play occurs in Mark Antony’s speech to the Romans, honoring Caesar in death, while pointing the accusing finger at “honorable” Brutus. He refers to Brutus’s role in the murder as “the most unkindest cut of all.” Antony questions the motives of the conspirators, while flattering the crowds into believing they are smart enough to see through Brutus’s lies and faulty rationalization. The fickle throng falls prey to Antony’s flattery. Furthermore, they believe Antony’s prophecy that “a curse shall light upon the limbs of men.” The assembled listeners run the conspirators out of Rome in an act of self-preservation.

It is true, of course, that Julius Caesar was merely a mortal, albeit a manipulative dictator. His contributions to Roman history and world literature are as immeasurable as his character traits. The myth of Julius Caesar will continue to influence Western thought as this exciting play continues to give insights into ancient Roman life, politics, and personalities.

Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* is based on Plutarch’s history. And even though Shakespeare either took liberties with Plutarch’s version or erred in his anachronistic Renaissance version, modern audiences and readers continue to question and study about “the noblest Roman of them all.”



# *Julius Caesar: A Play of Organization Men*

By Ken Adelman

Making plans is one thing, but making plans happen is quite another. *Julius Caesar* is a drama about turning intentions into results. It's a play which is all business and little play. There's no characteristic Shakespearean scene of love or humor.

Instead, the main characters are organization men who posture much of the time and are acutely aware of their roles in the establishment. They are ambitious men who build teams and judge each other carefully. They're leaders who strive to instill trust, organize their teams and implement plans under treacherous conditions.

They constantly gauge public opinion, and communicate their message with considerable spin and varying success. And, as they hold meetings and make decisions, they accept individual responsibility. "The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars but in ourselves" (1.2.146-147; all references to line numbers are from *The Folger Library General Reader's Shakespeare: Julius Caesar*. Louis B. Wright [New York: Washington Square Press, Inc., 1959]), as Cassius says. They use their reasoning powers but fully appreciate how fate and luck heavily affect results. Responding to teammates and opponents alike, they worry over their place in the corporate structure, as well as their ultimate success.

Their concerns are real, for problems constantly arise. Most are addressed and some even redressed. And, as always in Shakespeare, failures are a big part of the package. Each character is torn by choices while coping with practical situations as best he can. Each one makes more than a few mistakes and suffers more than a few business reversals.

In short, *Julius Caesar* is full of real-life characters who work hard to succeed. From their experiences contemporary leaders can find answers to that all-important question, "How can I get the job done?"

When the play opens, Rome is poised for a bull market of economic and imperialistic expansion as far as the forecasters can see. Consequently, common citizens adore their maximum leader, Julius Caesar. Yet some uncommon nobles, like Cassius, do not. It is not that he minds what Caesar does, since he succeeds at everything he takes on. Rather, it is what he is, which is great and haughty. Cassius, tough and shrewd on the outside, is fragile within. He complains that "Caesar doth bear me hard" (1.2.318), and measures most people by how they treat him.

Cassius faces an even tougher challenge than do hard-pressed modern executives. His enterprise—to rid Rome of Julius Caesar—demands great speed, stealth, and certitude. Attaining 90 percent of the goal cannot be deemed mission success. One should never wound the king.

Cassius's skills are suited to organizing a conspiracy. He has boundless energy, cunning, and the type of courage Caesar himself admires when saying that "Cowards die many times before their deaths; the valiant never taste of death but once" (2.2.33). More of an entrepreneur than a corporate type, Cassius requires the assistance of specialists because this project is complex, and a wise manager recognizes when he cannot do the job alone.

Shakespeare scribed a dozen plays on "divine right" kings, virtually none of them godlike leaders. Here, however, he portrays a self-made man who made himself quasi-divine. Though he appears in only three scenes, utters only 150 lines, and dies in the middle of the play, Julius Caesar dominates the drama. He deserved to hold the title to the play.

# Did Julius Caesar Choose to Die?

From *Insights*, 1992

Reprinted courtesy of Hersey-Sparling Meter Company, El Monte, California

On that fateful and bloody day, did Julius Caesar know that death was near? Did he know of the conspirators' plan to assassinate him? His soothsayer had said "Beware the Ides of March." Animal omens were bad. Yet, he chose to ignore them all.

On that day as he left for his fatal rendezvous with the Senate, Artimidorus, an old friend, pressed a message revealing the conspirators into Caesar's hand and begged him to read it. The aging dictator for some reason failed to look at it. Did he scornfully ignore the threat of death? The Grim Reaper was no stranger to this tough, valiant, and flamboyant leader.

Many times in desperately uneven battles on which Caesar liked to stake his luck, he saved the day by rushing in where his men were beaten back. During an early campaign in Gaul, his troops were surprised by an overwhelming onslaught of Nervii. Caesar rushed over to the Twelfth Legion which was being massacred. He seized a shield from a soldier in the rear ranks, pushed his way to the front, called upon his centurions by name, then sounded the charge. The gesture revived his men, and the Nervii were hacked to pieces.

His presence also helped win the last battle he ever fought, against Pompey's son, Gnaeus. Seeing confusion and panic in his ranks, he removed his helmet and ran "like a madman" to the front line where he insulted and exhorted his men. As this did not check their panic, he again seized a shield from a soldier and ran forward crying "it is here I am going to die."

Caesar dashed from the ranks and ran forward until he was no more than ten feet away from the enemy. A shower of more than 200 arrows fell around him; some passed without touching him, his shield protected him from the others. Each of his tribunes came running up with him and fought at his side. Thereupon, the entire army turned to fight with vehemence against the enemy.

In appearance, he was tall for a Roman. He had piercing black eyes and a hovering, ironic facial expression. He was subject to fits of epilepsy, but otherwise was in excellent health and had an abnormal capacity to endure hardships. He worked and fought, day and night, with little rest. Dressed as a dandy, he wore his hair combed forward to disguise his premature baldness and frequently wore a laurel wreath.

As a youthful lawyer, he decided to broaden his education and set out for Rhodes. On the way, he was captured by pirates, whom he promptly treated as servants. When he wanted to sleep he sent orders to his noisy captors to be quiet. They obeyed him meekly. He promised to have them crucified.

Six weeks later, after his ransom arrived and he was freed, he returned with several galleys, surprised the pirates in their lair and crucified them all—as he had promised.

After many battles, political and physical, he rose to the greatest heights of any Roman emperor. At least twice he refused the royal crown, saying loudly, "Jupiter alone is king. I am Caesar, not Rex [king]."

On the day of his death, he walked into the Senate meeting alone, unarmed. He joked with the soothsayer: "You see, the Ides of March have come." "Yes," replied Spurinna, "but they are not over yet." Senators pressed close to him, all pleading their individual cases. Caesar gestured: "Later, later." Closest was Tillius Cimber, one of the conspirators. He grabbed Caesar by the robe. Caesar cried, "But this is violence!"

At that moment, one of the Casca brothers tried to cut Caesar's throat with his dagger. Caesar caught his arm and ran it through with the only weapon he had, his stylus. If Caesar had wanted to

defend himself, why was he carrying only this pointed instrument of writing?

Another dagger practically pierced his breast. He was surrounded by the assassins. Each had sworn to plunge his blade into Caesar's body so all would be held responsible equally. In their confusion, they wounded each other.

After the first blow, Caesar uttered not a word. But when he saw Brutus, the son of his old mistress, about to deliver his blow, Caesar said in Greek (the aristocratic language of the day): "You too, my son?"

He then drew himself up against the statue of Pompey, his old ally and defeated enemy—the statue Caesar had generously ordered—pulled his gown over his face and allowed himself to be butchered in silence.

He knew the pot of vicious enmity was boiling. Romans respected bad omens and forecasts. Was he being contemptuous of danger? Or was he simply tired, at long last?

# The Truth about *Julius Caesar*

By Ace G. Pilkington

From *Midsummer Magazine*, 2001

Toward the end of George Bernard Shaw's *The Devil's Disciple*, General Burgoyne is asked, "What will History say?" He replies, "History, sir, will tell lies as usual" (*Complete Plays with Prefaces* Volume III [New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1963], 338). In *Julius Caesar*, Shakespeare does something far more difficult—he tells the truth. Lies, of course, are easy: plots can be straightforward, characters one-dimensional, and issues simple to resolve. Shakespeare almost never takes such an easy way out, but in the case of *Julius Caesar* he probably felt he had to be even more clever than usual. Most members of his audience would have known the story of Caesar in detail, many of them from the original Latin sources they had read at school. Those who hadn't had such an educational opportunity or who were lackluster students had available Sir Thomas North's very popular English version of Plutarch's *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*. Not only do the lives of Brutus, Caesar, and Antony provide Shakespeare's plot, but he also in many cases had picked up North's words and dropped them, slightly changed, into his play.

Given such circumstances, what did Shakespeare have to offer to the playgoers at his theatre? Of course, his language was more powerful than that of any other version. Even what he stole from North was improved. As Joseph Rosenblum says, "The thievery is brilliant" (*A Reader's Guide to Shakespeare* [New York: Barnes & Noble, 1999], 166). And Shakespeare was more than a great writer of historical/tragical plays, he was also (minor anachronisms like clocks and pockets aside) a brilliant historian. "While he will blunder in the physical detail of daily life . . . when he comes to deal with a Roman suicide, as distinct from an English suicide, he leaves the average modern student light-years behind. In the study of history Shakespeare lacked the means to walk, but he saw a way to run and seized it. The more sophisticated conceptions of the later historians are easily within his reach" (A. D. Nuttall, *A New Mimesis: Shakespeare and the Representation of Reality* [London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1983], 101).

What Shakespeare reached in *Julius Caesar* was a complex representation of historical truth. In the words of Harold Bloom, "The more often I reread and teach it, or attend a performance, the subtler and more ambiguous it seems, not in plot but in character" (*Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* [New York: Riverhead Books, 1998], 104). To tell the truth about history means getting at the uncertainties, contradictions, and complexities of the people who lived it. Caesar and Brutus, Antony and Cassius, Portia and Calpurnia, all see the world in different ways. Nor are those different visions as easy to categorize as they are in some other plays. There is no Iago who announces his villainy or Claudius who half-repents his murder. Much as in real life, Julius Caesar is populated by people who see themselves as heroes, people who strive to do the best for themselves and their country. That they kill each other and precipitate a civil war in the process is true to history, and it is simultaneously an example of that larger Truth which fiction is supposed to provide when it explores the mysteries of humanness.

The very title of Shakespeare's play is a part of that mystery. How can Julius Caesar be the title character when he is dead before the play has run half its course? Part of the answer is in Caesar's power to dominate even though he is gone, and part of the answer is in Shakespeare's unwillingness to untie and untangle this Human Gordian knot. "We are given totally contradictory judgments of Caesar's character and intentions. The impression we receive . . . during his few appearances, credulous, aging, sick, arrogant but, still shrewd and powerfully authoritative, could support any of these views. His character is vital and complex, but by the time he is dead, we know him no more absolutely than anyone in the play does" (John Wilders, *The Lost Garden: A View of Shakespeare's English and Roman History Plays* [London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1982], 92).

Caesar was in real life (and he is in Shakespeare's play) an extraordinary judge of character, a great repository of confidence (mostly in himself), and an unusually brilliant man with a wide range of abilities and interests. A. J. Langguth says of the historical Caesar, "Caesar hadn't been trying to charm Cicero when he wrote that extending the boundaries of the mind was better than expanding a nation's frontiers" (*A Noise of War: Caesar, Pompey, Octavia, and the Struggle for Rome* [New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994], 306). Was Caesar the genius not only of Rome but for Rome? The right man to solve the problems of a republic becoming, inevitably, an empire? Or was he an opportunistic politician "who seemed to wish to hoard every title to keep it away from younger challengers"? (Langguth 300). Were all his wars merely forced marches on the road to kingship? Still more tantalizingly horrible is the question that Brutus poses to himself (in 2.1), might Caesar become dangerously ambitious as he becomes more powerful? Should he be stopped before he can reach a temptation that must prove irresistible?

Beyond Caesar is Rome itself and the nature of rule and rulers, people, politics, and politicians. Will the death of Caesar bring a release from the danger of dictatorship or will it unleash anarchy and precipitate an inevitable battle for absolute power? It is Shakespeare's great gift that he makes us see the struggles and confusions of these characters. This is history come to life, history turned to tragedy on the stage of Truth. Edith Hamilton describes this great Roman crisis as "a cruel and bitter war which had not brought even to the victors the high exultation of a great enterprise achieved" (*The Roman Way* [New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1984], 167). What Shakespeare gives us is the exultation of experiencing and understanding what these humans thought and felt, and in some sense, what it feels like and means to be human.

# Why We Study *Julius Caesar*

The Roman virtues of being true to your husband, true to your friends, and true to your country, as well as the basic equality of men, were highly prized in the Elizabethan period, so they must have been much on Shakespeare's mind when he wrote *Julius Caesar* in 1599.

Like *Romeo and Juliet*, this play is a tragedy. You may argue that Caesar is not as sympathetic a character as Romeo or Juliet because of his ambition and possible corruptness, but the play is still definitely a tragedy. Caesar, indeed, isn't an innocent man, and his power has become corrupt. The play still captures human interest, but it is not for the sentimental romance such as that in *Romeo and Juliet*. It is because the issues that the characters face are so applicable today. *Julius Caesar* deals with corrupt governments, one's conscience, doing what will be good for everyone rather than thinking about one's self, and the ability to change the populace's minds. It also reaches into the area of grandness and becoming too ambitious.

The title is a bit misleading because the play's focus is not really Caesar. Caesar is killed about halfway through the play. Instead most people will agree that Brutus is the true hero in *Julius Caesar*. The play is about the internal conflict in Brutus over whether or not he should kill a friend for the good of the Roman people. Brutus is someone who remains good from the beginning to the end of the play. In the final scene, Mark Antony even says, "This was the noblest Roman of them all" when looking down at Brutus.

*Julius Caesar* is considered one of the world's greatest tragedies, and you will realize that it is very moving, partly because of its comparisons to our world today. (For instance, note the differences in the peaceful transition of power in United States elections compared to the assassination of Caesar and the resulting riots and wars.)

One of the most important themes is the question of what qualities make up a good leader. The play explores this question at length in its detailed examination of Caesar and Brutus as leaders. Your awareness of the constant scrutiny to which today's leaders are subjected makes the play's examination of leadership timely.

You may be quite opinionated about who is and is not a good leader. By comparing and contrasting the leadership qualities held by Caesar and Brutus, as well as many of the other characters, you can hopefully become more aware of the careful thought that is necessary to choose a good leader.

Another important and relevant issue is peer pressure. Nothing or no one has more influence on adolescents than their friends. The issue of friendship and the importance people place on it is another issue explored in the play. You may have strong opinions about the differing philosophies of friendship followed by Brutus and Antony. You can have lively discussions over the question of who is the better friend.

## Contemporary Relevance

How does *Julius Caesar* apply to us today? First of all, many of the lines from the play are famous now. For example, "It was Greek to me" comes from *Julius Caesar* (1.2.84). Caesar's famous line "Et tu, Brute!" (3.1.77) is known by almost everyone. Who hasn't heard of Antony's "Friends, Romans, countrymen" (3.2.73) speech? But even more important for us are the themes that come from the play.

## Suicide

Many of Shakespeare's plays deal with the topic of suicide. In *Julius Caesar*, many characters take their lives (or have others take their lives for them). Is this really right? Let's consider each case separately.

Portia: She commits suicide when she learns the fate of Brutus, her husband. What does the play provide as her reasoning? Does the action seem justified? What is Brutus's reaction? Is it what you expected?

Cassius: He had his servant kill him because he mistakenly thought that Brutus's armies were defeated. Don't you think that he should have checked to make sure his servant was correct? Taking one's life is a very serious matter, and Cassius seemed to give up so easily. What does Shakespeare tell us about people here? Possibly, people commit suicide because they are misinformed. So many young people today take their own lives because they don't think that people care about them. Like Cassius, they are misinformed!

Titinius: He finds Cassius dead, so he commits suicide out of shame. This is an interesting scenario. Was it a custom for that time? Or is there another answer?

Brutus: Brutus takes his life (runs into a servant's sword) when he discovers that he is defeated. He is described as "noble" by Antony. Is taking one's life really noble? Again, this could just be one of those cultural things at the time. However, it could be a case of simply "chickening out," and not facing hard trials.

### **Politics and the People**

Julius Caesar was a politician who was becoming very powerful, but he was not yet a tyrant. He wasn't all good, but he wasn't all bad either. Did he deserve to be removed from his position? Did he deserve to be killed? The conspirators believed so. This is an important issue today. How many countries have witnessed the assassinations of rulers? Do people have a right to assassinate their ruler if he or she is corrupt?

What does Shakespeare tell us about people? Is it that people are just like sheep? Can they be led in any direction, and their minds changed in an instant? What do the reactions of the people to Brutus's and Antony's speeches suggest? Shakespeare also showed that the people were a powerful force. The war could not have started without the people's support. How furious the people could get! Why does Shakespeare include the story of Cinna the poet? Is Shakespeare right in his perception of the people? Are there other suggestions in history to suggest these things?

### **Inner Struggles**

Brutus had to deal with a great inner struggle. Should he kill his friend out of duty to the people, or was his friendship with Caesar more important? His conflict was difficult because neither choice was completely right.

Everyone has to struggle with conflicts within themselves. They might not be as grand as Brutus's struggle, but there will be conflicts that will keep you up during the night. Brutus's conscience, as well as urging from his friends, led him to make his decision. He would do what was better for the people, even if it meant killing a friend. What evidence from the text supports Antony's assertion that Brutus stood alone as being truly "noble" in his actions?

The way Brutus solved his problem is a wonderful example for us. Humble yourself and think about the people that the problem affects instead of focusing on what's best for "me." You can also turn to your friends for advice; but in Brutus's case, they forged letters so that he would join their cause. Nice friends, right?

Was Brutus right, though? Should he have killed Caesar? The latter half of the play shows the consequence of Brutus's decision. Looking at that, Brutus may have been incorrect in his decision. What do you think?

# Vocabulary/Glossary Of Terms

**Ague:** fever, illness

“That same ague which hath made you lean.”

Caesar (2.2.114)

**Augurers:** fortune tellers

“The persuasion of his augurers may hold him from the capitol today.”

Cassius (2.1.208)

**Awl:** a shoemaker’s knife

“All that I live by is with the awl.”

Citizen, (1.1.22)

**Beholden:** indebted, obligated.

“I am beholden to you.”

Antony (3.2.63)

**Brook’d:** tolerated, stood for

“Brutus . . . would have brook’d / the eternal devil to keep his state in Rome /  
As easily as a king.”

Cassius (1.2.160)

**Chidden:** scolded, corrected

“All the rest look like a chidden train.”

Brutus (1.2.184)

**Choler:** anger

“Must I give way and room to your rash choler?”

Brutus (4.3.41)

**Coronets:** a small crown, for nobles

“Yet, ’twas not a crown neither, ’twas one of these coronets.”

Casca (1.2.237)

**Drachmas:** Greek coinage

“I had rather . . . drop my blood for drachmas”

Brutus (4.3.76–77)

**Exigent:** urgent or pressing.

“Why do you cross me in this exigent?”

Antony (5.1.19)

**Ides:** the middle day of the month

“Beware the ides of March.”

Soothsayer (1.2.20)

**Offal:** rotting, inedible meat

“What trash is Rome, what rubbish, and what offal.”

Cassius (1.3.110)

**Mace:** a club or staff-like weapon

“Lays’t thou thy leaden mace upon my boy?”

Brutus (4.3.276)

**Metal:** the stuff one is made of

“Thy honorable metal may be wrought / From that it is dispos’d.”

Cassius (1.2. 292)

**Mettle:** valor, courage, temperament



“He was quick mettle when he went to school.”

Brutus (1.2.296)

**Neats-leather:** cattle hide

“As proper men as ever trod on neats-leather have gone upon my handiwork.”

Citizen (1.1.26)

**Palter:** trifle or haggle

“Romans that have spoke the word and will not palter.”

Brutus (2.1.132)

**Prodigies:** a monstrous, unnatural, and wonderful event

“When these prodigies do so conjointly meet.”

Casca (1.3.28)

**Puissant:** powerful, potent.

“Most high, most mighty, and most puissant Caesar.”

Metellus (3.1.38)

**Rout:** rabble, mob

“I profess myself in banqueting to all the rout.”

Cassius (1.2.80)

**Smatch:** taste, smack

“Thy life hath had some smatch of honor in it.”

Brutus (5.5.50)

**Spaniel:** dog-like begging

“base spaniel fawning”

Caesar (3.1.58)

**Tarquin:** a cruel king of Roman legend

“My ancestors did from the streets of Rome the Tarquin drive.”

Brutus (2.1.56)

**Thews:** muscles, sinews, or strength

“Romans now have thews and limbs like to their ancestors.”

Cassius (1.3.82)

**Tinctures:** medicines that discolor

“Great men shall press for tinctures.”

Decius (2.2.89)

**Tributaries:** captives

“What tributaries follow him to Rome?”

Marullus (1.1.33)

# Famous Lines

William Shakespeare coined a number of phrases that we still use today, including the following from *Julius Caesar*.

Beware the ides of March.

—Soothsayer, 1.1.20

Chew upon this.

—Brutus, 1.2.272

But, for mine own part, it was Greek to me.

—Casca, 1.2.279

How many ages hence / Shall this our lofty scene be acted over / In states unborn and accents yet unknown.

—Cassius 2.1.122–124

As fire drives out fire, so pity pity.

—Brutus 2.1.183

Caesar, I have never stood on ceremonies.

—Calphurnia, 2.2.13

Cowards die many times before their deaths; the valiant never taste death but once.

—Caesar, 2.2.32–33

Your wisdom is consum'd in confidence.

—Calphurnia, 2.2.49

Et tu, Brute

—Caesar, 3.1.85

The noblest man that ever lived in the tide of times.

—Antony, 3.1.274

Cry Havoc and let slip the dogs of war.

—Antony, 3.1.290

Friends, Romans, Countrymen, lend me your ears; I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him.

—Antony 3.2.72–73

This was the most unkindest cut of all.

—Antony, 3.3.178

You yourself are much condemned to have an itching palm. (Probably not a Shakespeare original.)

—Brutus, 4.3.9-10

Words before blows: is it so, countrymen?

—Brutus, 5.1.27

This was the noblest Roman of them all.

—Antony 5.5.74

# Figurative Language

Shakespeare uses many types of figurative language like metaphor, simile, and personification. Recognizing when his characters are speaking figuratively helps to understand what they are saying. Both Antony and Brutus use a great deal of figurative language as they speak of revenge, justice, and battle. They especially use the images of animals, storms, and water.

## Examples of Personification

“O judgment thou art fled to brutish beasts.” —Antony, 3.3.103

Here Antony speaks of the thing, *Judgment*, as a person, claiming that it has fled, and left humans for animals.

Below are two more examples:

“Fortune is merry, and in this mood will give us anything.” —Antony, 3.3.255–256

“Mischief, thou art afoot. / Take thou what course thou wilt!” —Antony, 3.3.260

## Examples of Simile

Antony speaks with Octavius about their ally, Lepidus, who he does not respect. He uses a simile comparing Lepidus’s usefulness to that of a donkey.

“Octavius, I have seen more days than you.  
And though we lay these honors on this man  
To ease ourselves of divers slanderous loads,  
He shall but bear them *as* the ass bears gold,  
To groan and sweat under the business,  
Either led or driven, as we point the way,  
and having brought our treasure where we will,  
Then take we down his load and turn him off,  
*Like* to the empty ass, to shake his ears  
And graze in commons.”

—Antony, 4.1.19-28

## More Examples

Identify the these examples of figurative language in the lines below:

“Thou hast described  
A hot friend cooling. Ever note, Lucillius,  
When love begins to sicken and decay,  
It useth an enforcèd ceremony.  
There are no tricks in plain and simple faith.  
But hollow men, like horses hot at hand,  
Make gallant show and promise of their mettle.  
But when they should endure the bloody spur,  
They fall their crests and, like deceitful jades,  
Sink in the trial. Comes his army on?”

—Brutus 4.2.19–28

“There is a tide in the affairs of men,  
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;  
Omitted, all the voyage of their life  
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.

On such a full sea are we now afloat,  
And we must take the current when it serves  
Or lose our ventures.”

—Brutus 4.3.226–232

“It is the bright day that brings forth the adder / and that craves wary walking.”

—Brutus 2.1.14–15

# Shakespeare's Language: Prose vs Verse

Many students—and adults, for that matter—find Shakespeare difficult to read and hard to understand. They accuse him of not speaking English and refuse to believe that ordinary people spoke the way his characters do. However, if you understand more about his language, it is easier to understand. One idea that may help is to remember that his plays are written in two forms: prose and verse. In *Julius Caesar* prose is used very rarely.

Prose is the form of speech used by common, or comic, people in Shakespearean drama. There is no rhythm or meter in the line. It is everyday language. Shakespeare's audiences would recognize the speech as their language. When a character in a play speaks in prose, you know that he is a lower class member of society. These are characters such as criminals, servants, and pages. However, some times important characters can speak in prose. For example, the majority of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is written in prose because it deals with the middle-class. In *Julius Caesar* the comical Casca's story of Caesar's refusal of the crown is given in prose. Interestingly Brutus's speech to the people after Caesar's murder is delivered in prose, but Antony's is verse, the more sophisticated style. Why did Shakespeare use these different styles? Compare the speeches, and the reactions they generate, and draw your own conclusions.

## Prose

“Romans, countrymen, and lovers! Hear me for my cause, and be silent that you may hear. Believe me for mine honor, and have respect to mine honor that you may believe. Censure me in your wisdom, and awake your senses that you may the better judge. If there be any in this assembly, any dear friend of Caesar's, to him I say that Brutus' love to Caesar was no less than his. If then that friend demand why Brutus rose against Caesar, this is my answer: not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved Rome more.”

—Brutus, 3.2.13–21

## Verse

“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 interrèd 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 answered it....  
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 honorable 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 honorable 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.”

—Antony, 3.2.72–106

Antony’s speech is given in blank verse. It contains no rhyme, (though a great amount of repetition; can you hear the sarcasm in his “honorable men” growing as the speech moves?) but each line has an internal rhythm with a regular rhythmic pattern. The pattern most favored by Shakespeare is iambic pentameter.

Iambic pentameter is defined as a ten-syllable line with the stress on the every second syllable. The rhythm of this pattern of speech is often compared to a beating heart. Examine Antony’s final line and count the syllables it contains.

“And I must pause till it come back to me.”

Replace the words with syllabic count:

1-2    3-4        5-6    7-8    9-10

Replace the word with a “da” sound to hear the heart beat:

da-DA da-DA da-DA da-DA da-DA

Now put the emphasis on the words themselves:

and-I must-PAUSE til-IT come-BACK to-ME

In the riot scene that follows Antony’s speech, the angry people speak in prose and attack and kill the poet Cinna, who also speaks prose to them. The lack of rhythm during this scene adds to the feeling of panic and chaos.

# Evolving English

The English language is in constant change. Just as today we use words such as “cool” and “hot” in ways that were never considered just fifty years ago, so too are the meanings of words from Shakespeare’s time unfamiliar to us. Here are some examples of how we might phrase some of Shakespeare’s words today:

“These growing feathers pluck’d from Caesar’s wing / will make him fly an ordinary pitch.”

— Flavius (1.1.71–73)

*“This ought to bring him down a notch or two.”*

“But, for my single self, I had as lief not be as live to be / In awe of such a thing as I myself.”

— Cassius (1.2.96–97)

*“But, for my part, I’d rather be dead than have to live worshiping a man no better than I am.”*

“Tell me your counsels, I will not disclose ‘em. / I have made strong proof of my constancy.”

— Portia (2.1.307–308)

*“I would never tell anyone your secrets. I can prove it to you.”*

“Fetch the will hither, and we shall determine / How to cut off some charge in legacies.”

— Antony (4.1.9–10)

*“Bring Caesar’s will here, and we will decide how to carry it out.”*

Brutus: Peace, peace! You durst not so have tempted him [Caesar].

Cassius: I durst not!

Brutus: No

Cassius: What, durst I not tempt him?

Brutus: For your life you durst not.” (4.3.62–66)

*Brutus: Oh shut up! You wouldn’t dare speak to Caesar like that.*

*Cassius: I wouldn’t dare?*

*Brutus: No.*

*Cassius: What, I wouldn’t dare speak to him?*

*Brutus: Not on your life, you wouldn’t.*

# Elementary School Discussion Questions

*All of the following questions are easily adaptable to any age group.*

## **Compare and Contrast**

1. How are Cassius and Brutus similar and different?
2. Name other power hungry characters from stories, film, television, or politics.  
Why can this be a dangerous quality?
3. If you were in the play who would you want to be?

## **Relational**

1. How do you handle a situation when one of your best friends becomes bossy or snobbish?
2. What do you do if other people start talking about your friend behind his or her back?
3. Why is it a bad idea to run away from your mistakes? Is it good to take the punishment for your crime?
4. Have you ever made a hasty decision, like Cassius, before you knew all the facts?

## **Textual**

1. Who gave a better speech, Brutus or Antony? Who do you think was right?
2. Cassius flatters Brutus to convince him to join his cause. How do we use flattery today to get what we want?
3. Look at the opening scene between Flavius and the cobbler (1.1.1–24). What is a pun?

## **Shakespeare's World**

1. Most everyone in Shakespeare's time knew the sad story of Caesar. Think of an interesting historical figure that you would like to write a play about.
2. There are some anachronisms in the play, such as the sound of a clock striking, before clocks had been invented. Is this bad? Can you think of any other anachronisms you have seen in movies or books? Do you think Shakespeare would be concerned about this?
3. What are some examples of superstition and bad omens in the play that lead up to Caesar's death? Do you think Shakespeare was superstitious? Do you believe in any superstitions?



# High School Discussion Questions:

## Compare and Contrast

1. Compare what you know about the women in the play to women today. How has the role of a wife changed? Is it better or worse for women today?
2. Research the life and actual events that we know about Caesar's murder. How much artistic license did Shakespeare take in his play?
3. Compare what we know of Caesar's actions in the play from what he is accused of by Cassius and Brutus. Was he a threat to the republic or not?

## Relational

1. Is there such a thing as honorable preemptive murder or crime? Is it right to kill in order to prevent something that might happen (i.e. Caesar might have become an evil emperor)?
2. Consider the political world of America. Today senators do not kill one another physically, but what kinds of tricks do they play to "kill" one another's careers?
3. Cassius and Brutus both commit suicide at the end of the play in order to escape their perceived failures. What are the real effects of suicide?

## Textual

1. Based on what Cassius says in 1.2.90–161, 308–322 concerning his motives for wishing to be rid of Caesar what are we to think of Cassius? Is he right? Should we pity him? What can we make of his character? See also, 4.2.93–106
2. Why is the play called Julius Caesar if he only appears alive in three scenes? How does Caesar remain an important character in the play after his death? Look especially at the comments Brutus makes about him in the battle scenes.
3. Examine Portia's speech to Brutus in 2.1.237–302. What do we learn about her idea of honor? From Brutus's response to her what do we learn about their relationship as husband and wife?

## Shakespeare's World

1. Romans viewed suicide as honorable; the Christian world views it as a sin. What is Shakespeare saying about suicide in this play? Examine each example and draw conclusions.
2. Brutus and Messala both claim to be followers of the Stoic philosophy. What is Stoicism? What do you think was Shakespeare's attitude about Stoicism?
3. This play was written only a few years before Queen Elizabeth I's death. What comparisons could be drawn between the English monarchy of Shakespeare's day and Caesar's Roman republic?

# Activities

## *Julius Caesar* 2008

After they have read the play, have students brainstorm a list of powerful personalities (politicians, celebrities, socialites) in today's world. Compare these people to characters in the play. Try and make a cast list with the characters and their modern day equivalents. This could also be done with fictional characters.

## Your Class vs Julius Caesar, case 31544

Hold a mock trial against Caesar. Use evidence from the text to find out if he is really worthy of death. Brutus may serve as the judge, a few Roman citizens as jury. Cassius may serve as chief prosecutor and Antony as representative for defense. You may hear testimony from other senators, Caesar's family, etc.

## Et tu Brute? Role Play

Have students think of modern equivalents to Brutus's situation. For example, a friend is trying to persuade you to drive without a license. He says it's an emergency, you are a careful driver, but . . . What will you do? Or, our best friend has been elected student body president. Soon, you notice that he or she is taking advantage of the position by treating people differently, or cheating on assignments. How would you deal with this situation?

## Mud Slinging

Assign students in small groups to create a mud slinging campaign against the political parties of Brutus and Cassius or Antony and Octavius. They can create radio spots and commercials, design posters, T-shirts, or bumper stickers exposing their opponents' flaws. Have students "pitch" their campaign to the rest of the class.

## A Roman Alphabet Book

Have students prepare an alphabet of words from A to Z, either from the text or related to *Julius Caesar*. For maximum points, the alphabet must be in dictionary form—phonetic spelling, part of speech, definition, origin, and an illustration (preferably textual).

For example, "Ides: [ahydz] noun (used with a singular or plural verb). In the ancient Roman calendar the fifteenth day of March, May, July, or October, and the thirteenth day of the other months. Old French. "Beware the ides of March." Soothsayer, 1.1.20.

## Opinionnaire: What is Democracy, Politics, Patriotism, and Protest

Before reading the play, have students take the following "yes or no" survey to determine what they think about democracy and political systems. Have them retake the survey after having studied the play; discuss how their opinions have changed.

1. Murder is never justified.
2. People, not politicians, know what is best for their country.
3. If a political leader becomes too powerful, it is right to get rid of him or her by whatever means necessary.
4. Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.
5. In certain situations it may be justified for a political leader to bend or break the law for the good of the country.
6. People should never compromise their ideals or beliefs.
7. "My country right or wrong" is not just a slogan; it is every citizen's patriotic duty.
8. No cause, political or otherwise, is worth dying for.
9. Cowards die many times before their deaths; the valiant taste of death but once.
10. The evil that men do lives after them; the good is [often buried] with their bones.

(Adapted from <http://members.accessus.net/~bradley/Politics,Patriotism,andProtestOpinionnaire.htm>)

### **Very Superstitious**

Make a list of the omens, auguries, and superstitions that are brought up in the play. Make a parallel list of the superstitions that we have today. Invite students of different cultural backgrounds to explain the role of superstition in their culture. (For instance in many Asian languages the number four, sounds like the word for death, and therefore some buildings do not have a fourth floor.) What role does superstition play in our culture? When was the last time you crossed your fingers?

### **Timing**

Create production designs of costumes and sets for the play if it were set in different eras or governments. How does the time in which the play is set affect its meaning. For instance, if we place Rome in 1930s Germany and give Caesar a small mustache his murder changes the course of modern history.

Eras to consider:

1963, United States, John F. Kennedy

1918, Russia, Nicolas II

1649, England, Charles I

1788, United States, George Washington

### **Words/Cell Phones before Blows**

There is a lack of open communication in the play. Identify moments where clear communication could have made a difference. Supposing the Romans had cell phones, have students write or improve conversations like:

Brutus asks Caesar what his true intentions are.

Portia calls Brutus to see how the battle is going.

Titinius calls Cassius to explain that it was his own army at his tents

Antony calls Brutus to negotiate a truce at the end of the battle

### **Build-a-Leader**

Based on what has been learned from *Julius Caesar* about good leaders, have students create a profile, including picture, personal background, qualifications, voting record, and basic tenants, of their ideal leader in today's world. (This should not be a real person.)

# Lesson Plan

**Title:**

“Lend Me Your Ears”

**Objective:**

Students will demonstrate their understanding of the power of rhetoric by examining the speeches of Brutus and Antony.

**Materials:**

Pen, paper, passages of *Julius Caesar*, especially Act 3, Scene 2

**Age Level:**

Middle to high school

**Anticipatory Set/Hook:**

Assign two charismatic students to stand on desks at opposite ends of the room and read/perform Brutus’s and Antony’s speeches. Invite other students to cheer, boo, and heckle.

**Process:**

1. Discuss the reaction of the crowd in the classroom, and the reaction of the crowd in the play. Why are these words so powerful? Discuss a few examples from modern history of how speeches have affected history, i.e. President Bush’s address to the nation after the 9/11 attacks or Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream” speech.
2. Distribute a hand out on, review, or create a list of rhetorical devices and figurative language. Sample terms to discuss may include the following:
  - Rhetoric*: language and effects used to impress or persuade an audience
  - Rhetorical Question*: a question asked for effect, without needing to be answered
  - Exaggeration*: overstating a viewpoint, statement, or idea
  - Understatement*: understating a viewpoint for effect
  - Contrast/Juxtaposition*: placing two opposite viewpoints, ideas, or concepts close to each other for effect
  - Quotation*: quoting popular sources like the Bible, movies, proverbs, or famous speeches to create a common, shared experience
  - Personal Pronouns*: using pronouns like we, your, mine, our to create a link with the audience or they to create distance with other ideas
  - Positive/Negative Connotation*: using words that are connected in the social mindset to positive or negative things or events
  - Oral Devices*: devices used by a speaker to engage and retain his audience
  - Alliteration*: repetition of the sound of the initial consonant in a group of words.
  - Assonance*: repetition of a vowel sound for aural effect
  - Onomatopoeia*: using words which sound like the thing or concept they describe
  - Rhyming*: using words with similar sounds, allowing the audience to anticipate coming words
  - Figurative Language*: words that create images in the mind of the listener
  - Metaphor*: connecting two unrelated things using direct comparison, using the word “is”

*Simile*: connecting two unrelated things or ideas using “like” or “as”

*Personification*: assigning human qualities to non-human or inanimate objects

*Repetition*: repeating a word, in various forms in order to keep in the forefront of the audience’s mind

*Parallel Structure*: using phrases or groups of words repeatedly

*Listing*: creating a list in order to emphasize a point

Terms provided by *The Language of Oratory*, New Zealand Ministry of Education, found at <http://english.unitec.ac.nz/resources/resources/oratory.html>

3. Have students, in small groups, or individually, dissect Brutus’s or Antony’s speech pinpointing the rhetorical devices they employ.
4. Have a few students present their findings to the class. Discuss the implication of these devices. Was it ethical of Antony to tempt the crowd’s anger by mentioning Caesar’s will?

**Conclusion/Assignment:**

Have students brainstorm, choose a topic, and write a rhetorical speech of about twenty-five sentences (like Brutus’s speech) using at least five of the rhetorical devices discussed.

Possible ideas include:

- Getting their curfew extended
- Getting a job
- Buying something they’ve wanted for a long time
- Electing a new principal
- Extending their lunch break
- Eliminating homework assignments
- Support for a current political candidate or issue

Have students present their speech to the class, and turn in a copy to you. Encourage appropriate audience participation during readings.

**Tools for Assessment:**

Assessment occurs throughout this lesson as students:

- Act as an audience during the reading of speeches of Brutus and Antony.
  - Participate in the discussion of rhetorical devices.
  - Work in groups as they dissect the speech, or turn in the list of devices found in the speech of Brutus or Antony.
  - Present their rhetorical speech.
  - Act as audience during the reading of their peer’s speeches.
- Use a normal rubric for grading the writing assignment.