

JULIUS CAESAR

Close Reading Worksheet One Act I, Scenes I, II

Answer these questions in the necessary detail in your workbook.

Act I, Scene I

1. What does this scene reveal about the atmosphere and the political situation in Rome?
2. The Roman crowd will appear several times in the play. What is your impression of them in this scene?
3. Shakespeare uses puns—words having the same sound but different meanings. Give three examples of such puns.
4. At the close of the scene, Flavius compares Caesar to a bird. Tell why.

Act I, Scene II

5. Based on the opening directions and on the events of the scene, how would you stage the grand entrance and the opening speeches?
6. In his first two appearances, what strengths and weaknesses does Caesar reveal?
7. What are your first impressions of Antony? What does Brutus call him?
8. In their long dialogue, what strategies does Cassius use to sway Brutus?
9. Why is Caesar's comment about his deafness ironic?
10. What do we learn from the first soliloquy of Cassius?

Application

Cassius tells Brutus, "The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves, that we are underlings." In an essay discuss the question: To what extent do we have control of our fates?



Your teacher will assign one or more of these activities. Each activity presents a problem or conflict situation. As you respond, think of actual experiences or use your imagination to invent experiences or combine actual and imaginary experiences. Also, follow the steps or clues for development outlined in the directions. To help yourself get started, jot some notes on this paper.

1. The following words can each be used to describe people you know.

ambitious	cruel	honest	restless
articulate	emotional	loyal	skinny
athletic	envious	open	stoical
brave	firm	patriotic	superstitious
conceited	fun-loving	principled	trusting
crafty	handicapped	quick-tempered	weak (physically)

List these words in two columns, one for the words you think are positive, one for the negative words. (Look up unfamiliar words in a dictionary.) In each column, list the words in order, the most positive/negative at the top, the least positive/negative at the bottom. In a paragraph, state and explain the reason(s) for your choices.

2. Your best friend is running for office in your school or club. You realize that your friend is obsessed with obtaining power and would be destructive to the group if elected. Should you stick by him/her to avoid losing a friend, campaign for the other side, or try to change your friend? First, outline the pros and cons of each choice. Then, write an essay, identifying and explaining your decision.

3. On a school camp a teacher announces at a meeting that one of your friends is to be sent home for breaking the rules. You believe the punishment is harsh and unfair, and you want to persuade your fellow students to protest. Write a speech you could give that would incite them to act. Identify the violation. State the punishment. Give your reasons for protesting. Remember, you want to convince your audience to do what you want.

• TEACHER'S GUIDE Julius Caesar

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BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

William Shakespeare was born in 1564 in the town of Stratford-upon-Avon, England. Although we have less information about his personal life than we would wish to, we know enough to be sure that he did indeed write the plays that made him known as the greatest of the world's dramatists. The son of John Shakespeare, a businessman and active citizen, Shakespeare presumably went to the town school, where he probably received a good education at the hands of a university-trained master. In 1582 he married Anne Hathaway; they had three children. Aside from these facts, all we know is that he reached London in the late 1580's and soon became well-known as a playwright and poet. In 1594 he helped form a theatre company called the Lord Chamberlain's Men, which in 1603 became the King's Men, and became a partner in the Globe Theatre, where the company performed. He supposedly acted small parts in his own plays, including the Ghost in *Hamlet*. His success in the theatre allowed him to purchase a family coat of arms, as well as one of the best houses in Stratford. He retired to his home town around 1611 and lived there until his death on April 23, 1616.

MAJOR WORKS

Shakespeare wrote over three dozen plays, as well as sonnets and two long narrative poems. His plays are generally classified as histories, comedies, tragedies, and romances. Principal examples of each type are

- Histories: *Richard II*, *Henry IV* (Parts I and II), *Richard III*. About the struggles for power in fourteenth and fifteenth century England
- Comedies: *As You Like It*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Twelfth Night*. About young lovers overcoming obstacles; full of clowning and mistaken identities
- Tragedies: *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Antony and Cleopatra*. About the deaths of kings and other high people, whether through error or crime
- Romances: *The Winter's Tale*, *The Tempest*. About the reuniting of separated lovers and families; full of magic and mystery

See Related Reading for works by Shakespeare specifically connected to *Julius Caesar*.

CHIEF CHARACTERISTICS

Julius Caesar displays many of the principal qualities on which Shakespeare's fame rests; among these are the diversity and vitality of his characters, the richness of his language, and his concern with universal human questions. Although the principal characters of this play are all famous historical figures, they are remembered today primarily because of the treatment Shakespeare gives them. "Lean and hungry" Cassius, wily Antony, vain Caesar, and principled Brutus all stand out as real individuals, not names from a history text. Even Shakespeare's minor characters have the spark that makes them live. In this male-dominated play, for example, Calpurnia and Portia show similarity in their concern for their husbands and difference in their fearfulness or their courage. Such lesser figures as Casca, Cinna the poet, and even the humble cobbler lend a touch of humor, often grim, to the serious proceedings.

The language of Shakespeare's characters, whether blank verse or prose, reveals their personalities, and their imagery is filled with signs of the play's meaning. Mark Antony's funeral oration, which characterizes him as profoundly different from Brutus in the latter's speech, is a masterpiece of persuasive oratory. Like many speeches and even phrases from the play—"I am as constant as the northern star," "the brave man dies but once," "not in our stars but in ourselves"—it has become part of the consciousness of educated English speakers throughout the world.

These dramatic skills would matter less, however, if they were not used to treat the great questions of life. In *Julius Caesar*, for example, Shakespeare examines the dilemma of a good man forced to choose between loyalty to a friend and loyalty to a principle. Because he is a great artist and a student of human nature, Shakespeare examines this question from all sides, showing his characters "in the round." None of the principal characters, however virtuous, are without weakness, and none, however corrupt, are without virtues. *Julius Caesar* further challenges us to consider such large questions as the roles played by circumstance and by choice in leading us to our fates and, again, gives us no easy answer.

RELATED READING

- Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* follows the victorious Antony to love and defeat in Egypt. Like Brutus, Hamlet is faced with a difficult personal choice in *Hamlet*. *Macbeth* is a further study of the lust for power and its destructive effects.
- Thornton Wilder's *The Ides of March* (1948) retells the story of Caesar's assassination in a series of fictional letters by Roman characters.
- George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1946) is a parable of political idealism and corruption among the creatures on a farm.