

THE GLENCOE LITERATURE LIBRARY

Study Guide

for

**The Tragedy of
Julius Caesar**

by **William Shakespeare**



New York, New York Columbus, Ohio Woodland Hills, California Peoria, Illinois

Meet William Shakespeare



*Thou art a monument without a tomb,
And art alive still while thy book doth live,
And we have wits to read and praise to give.*

—Ben Jonson, “To the Memory of My Beloved
Master William Shakespeare”

William Shakespeare was born in 1564 in Stratford-upon-Avon, a small market town about a hundred miles from London. His father, a glove maker and landowner, rose to the position of bailiff (equivalent to mayor) in 1568. His mother came from a prosperous farming family. Shakespeare probably attended Stratford’s grammar school, where he would have received a solid education in classical literature and Latin. At age eighteen, he married Ann Hathaway, who was eight years older than he. She bore a daughter, Susanna, in 1583, and twins, Judith and Hamnet, in 1585. Hamnet, Shakespeare’s only son, died in 1596.

“**Upstart Crow**” Sometime after 1585, Shakespeare moved to London and began his career as an actor and playwright. By 1592 he was already successful enough to arouse the jealousy of Robert Greene, a writer who denounced him as an “upstart crow.” Greene felt that an actor should not compete with university-trained writers, but

others did not share this prejudice. Shakespeare seemed to have found patrons among the nobility, and in 1594 he joined the theater company the Lord Chamberlain’s Men. With Shakespeare as their principal dramatist, the company (later renamed the King’s Men) became England’s leading theater company.

Literary Achievements Shakespeare excelled in all forms of drama. At first, he mainly wrote comedies and English history plays. His early triumphs include *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *Henry IV*, and *Romeo and Juliet*, a romantic tragedy that has remained especially popular with young people. Most critics agree that Shakespeare’s creative powers peaked between 1600 and 1607, when he wrote *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, and other tragic masterpieces. During this period, his comedies grew darker and more complex. From 1608 to 1611, Shakespeare concentrated on “romances” such as *A Winter’s Tale* and *The Tempest*. These plays, with their fanciful plots, portray human suffering that leads to forgiveness and renewal. Shakespeare wrote two narrative poems and a book of sonnets in addition to his thirty-seven plays.

Later Life and Reputation Shakespeare’s share in his theater company and part-ownership of its theaters brought him wealth. He bought a large house for his family in Stratford, although he still lived in London for much of the year. Around 1610, he began spending more time in Stratford, where he eventually retired. Shakespeare died in 1616. In 1623, two theater colleagues published a collection of his plays. Known as the First Folio, this edition played an important role in preserving his work. The volume includes a commemorative poem by Ben Jonson, who declares that Shakespeare was “not of an age, but for all time.” His plays are performed throughout the world, and they continue to inspire writers, filmmakers, and other artists.

Introducing the Drama

Perhaps more powerfully than in any of his previous plays, Shakespeare creates an intense sense of a social universe: we feel and smell this Rome; we understand its values and the power exerted by its social ethos on the main protagonists.

—Vivian Thomas, *Julius Caesar*

BACKGROUND

In 1599 the Lord Chamberlain's Men built a new open-air playhouse called the Globe. *Julius Caesar* was one of the first plays performed there. Located south of London, the Globe was a circular building that held about three thousand people. Its large stage jutted out into an open yard, where "groundlings" could stand and watch for only a penny. Better-off theatergoers paid extra to sit in one of the covered galleries that extended around the theater.

The Globe had no lighting, so all performances took place in the afternoon. Shakespeare relied on language to establish the setting of his plays. For example, a character's description of the moon told audiences that a scene was set at night. The only scenery consisted of props such as tables and chairs. Instead of being a handicap, the bare stage gave playwrights greater flexibility. *Julius Caesar*, like many of Shakespeare's plays, shifts rapidly among a variety of locations.

Although theatergoers were willing to imagine the setting, they expected costumes to look realistic. Because women were banned from the public stages, boy actors played the female roles. Their high voices, along with wigs and gowns, helped create the illusion. Actors had to be prepared for many distractions. People commonly ate, drank, and talked during performances. The stage was surrounded by rowdy groundlings, and fights sometimes broke out. Yet audiences at the Globe had to have been fairly sophisticated to appreciate Shakespeare's plays.

THE TIME AND PLACE

Julius Caesar depicts Rome's transition from a republic to an empire. According to ancient historians, the republic dates back to 509 B.C., when the last Roman king was expelled and two consuls shared control of Rome's military. Each year a new pair of consuls had to be elected. The Senate was the republic's most important political institution. It was composed of several hundred members of Rome's leading families, who could serve for life. Two citizen assemblies made laws and elected Rome's magistrates, including consuls. Although the Senate was supposed only to advise the magistrates and the assemblies, it actually held most of the power.

Over several centuries, Rome greatly expanded its territories in a series of foreign wars, but these conquests created internal tensions. Some politicians began to challenge the Senate's authority. Often they gained support from disgruntled veterans and other neglected members of society. Beginning in 133 B.C., Rome was plagued by widespread corruption and civil warfare.

In 60 B.C., Rome came under the control of the wealthy politician Crassus and two military leaders, Julius Caesar and Pompey. This coalition was known as the First Triumvirate. Crassus died in 53, and soon Pompey and Caesar were at odds with each other. After Pompey tried to strip Caesar of his powers in 49, Caesar crossed into Italy, forcing Pompey to flee. Pompey was killed the next year in Egypt. Caesar continued to meet resistance from Pompey's sons. He finally defeated them in 45 and returned to Rome, where he had himself appointed dictator for life. Shakespeare's play opens in 44 B.C., when it appeared that Caesar might topple the republic and reestablish a monarchy.

Did You Know?

Julius Caesar was born in 100 B.C. He rose to prominence through military success and shrewd political maneuverings. He became wealthy and famous from his conquest of Gaul, a territory in western Europe. His books about the conquest and Rome's civil wars are literary classics.

Caesar gained complete control of Rome by 45 B.C., having defeated Pompey and his

supporters. He quickly introduced new policies, such as reforming the Senate and extending Roman citizenship to residents of the provinces. He also established a new calendar, which is still used today in a revised form. Although these changes benefited many people, they angered members of the nobility, who also resented the loss of their power. A group of conspirators killed Caesar in 44 B.C.

CRITIC'S CORNER

The critic Ernest Schanzer commented on the paradoxes inherent in the play:

Julius Caesar is one of Shakespeare's most perplexing plays. Its stylistic simplicity, coupled with an absence of bawdy lines, has made it a favorite school text, and this has led some critics to believe that it ought to be a simple play, a belief which has easily ripened into the conviction that it is a simple play. Others have acknowledged its perplexities. . . . There is widespread disagreement among critics about who is the play's principal character or whether it has a principal character, on whether it is a tragedy and if so whose, on whether Shakespeare wants us to consider the assassination as damnable or praiseworthy, while of all the chief characters in the play violently contradictory interpretations have been offered.

—Ernest Schanzer, "The Problem of 'Julius Caesar'"

Before You Read

Julius Caesar Act 1

FOCUS ACTIVITY

Think of effective leaders—either public figures or people whom you know. What qualities do they have in common?

Share Ideas

With a partner, brainstorm a list of qualities that are often found in successful leaders. Discuss why these qualities might help one become a successful leader.

Setting a Purpose

Read to discover different characters' reactions to Julius Caesar's leadership.

BACKGROUND

Did You Know?

In Act 1, Julius Caesar attends the feast of Lupercal, held yearly to honor a fertility god. It began with the sacrifice of goats and a dog at the Lupercal, a cave where Rome's legendary founders, Romulus and Remus, allegedly were nursed by a she-wolf. Young men called "Luperci" would dress themselves in the goatskins and run around the Palatine Hill, one of the seven hills on which ancient Rome was built. They carried goat thongs that they used to strike people, especially women who could not have children. The ritual was said to help women become fertile. The Romans celebrated dozens of religious festivals, many involving games or spectacles. These events provided amusement for the poor and gave leaders an opportunity to interact with common people.

Shakespeare's Soliloquies

In Shakespeare's plays, characters sometimes make speeches when they are alone on stage. These **soliloquies** reveal a character's private thoughts and are a means of providing important information to the audience. In Act 1, Scene 2, Cassius delivers a soliloquy that reveals a plot to influence Brutus to participate in the conspiracy to overthrow Caesar. It involves sending letters to Brutus that express the Romans' high regard for him. Related to soliloquies are **asides**—comments made to the audience that cannot be heard by other characters present on stage. These asides appear in brackets. As you continue to read, look for other soliloquies and asides that impart important information to the audience.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

amiss [ə mis'] *adj.* wrong, improper (p. 19)

battlement [bat'əl mənt] *n.* a parapet having a series of indentations along its upper edge, used for defense (p. 3)

countenance [koun'tə nəns] *n.* face, features (p. 7)

encompass [en kum pəs] *v.* to form a circle around (p. 13)

ere [ār] *prep.* before (p. 11)

fawn [fôn] *v.* to seek notice or favor by acting in a servile manner (p. 9)

infirmity [in fur'mə tē] *n.* physical weakness; feebleness (p. 19)

mettle [met'əl] *n.* spirit and courage (p. 3)

Responding

Julius Caesar Act 1

Personal Response

Which character appeals to you the most so far? Why?

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. How do Flavius and Murellus respond when they meet commoners who are celebrating Caesar's triumph? What elicits this response?

2. What is Cassius's impression of Caesar in Scene 2? To what extent does Brutus agree with him?

3. What happens when Antony offers Caesar a crown? How does the crowd respond to Caesar's actions?

4. Describe Cassius's and Casca's reactions to the storm. What do their reactions reveal about their characters?

5. What action does Cassius take to win Brutus over? Why is it important for him to gain Brutus's support?

Responding

Julius Caesar Act 1

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

6. Do you think that Cassius's assessment of Caesar is fair? Why or why not?

7. Did Caesar really not want to be crowned king, or was his refusal a ploy to win the public's allegiance? Why or why not?

Literature and Writing

Evaluating Characters

In the **Focus Activity** on page 16, you listed qualities that are often found in successful leaders. In your opinion, which character in *Julius Caesar* is best suited for leadership? Write one or two paragraphs in response to this question. Use the list you created and evidence from the play to support your opinion.

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

Are the conspirators motivated by a sense of public duty, or do they care only about themselves? Discuss this question in your group. Afterward, share your conclusions with the class.

Learning for Life

Imagine that you are a television reporter in ancient Rome. Present a news report that covers both Julius Caesar's triumphant return to Rome after having defeated Pompey and his refusal to accept the Roman crown. To capture the mood of the people, include eyewitness interviews with Roman citizens in your report.

Save your work for your portfolio.

Before You Read

Julius Caesar Act 2

FOCUS ACTIVITY

What was the most difficult decision you have ever had to make in your life? Why was it difficult?

Journal

In your journal, describe how you arrived at the decision. Did you discuss it with friends or relatives? Do you feel that you made the right decision, or would you change it if you could?

Setting a Purpose

Read to find out how Brutus decides to join the conspiracy against Caesar.

BACKGROUND

Did You Know?

Marcus Brutus claimed to have descended from the founder of the Roman Republic. In 509 B.C., Lucius Junius Brutus led a revolt against Tarquinius Superbus, Rome's seventh king. Ancient historians describe Tarquinius as a tyrant who killed many senators. Brutus supposedly expelled him and his family after Tarquinius's son took advantage of a noblewoman. Brutus, one of the first consuls elected, made the Roman people swear never to accept another king. Much of the story may be legend, but it does reflect the Romans' long-standing dislike of kings. Even the emperors avoided using the title.

Anticipation and Anxiety

Suspense is the anticipation of the outcome of events, especially as they affect a character for whom one has sympathy. Suspense produces an uncertainty that causes anxiety. For instance, Act 1 of *Julius Caesar* raises the question of whether Brutus will join Cassius's conspiracy. As you read Act 2 of *Julius Caesar*, take note of the incidents that increase the level of suspense.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

affability [af'ə bil'i tē] *n.* easiness to approach and speak to (p. 37)

appertain [ap'ər tān'] *v.* to relate to (p. 49)

augment [ôg ment'] *adj.* to make greater as in size or amount (p. 35)

faction [fak' shən] *n.* a group of people within a larger group, esp. a dissenting one acting to promote its own ends (p. 37)

hew [hū] *v.* to make or shape with cutting blows, as from an ax (p. 43)

interpose [in' tər pōz'] *v.* to place between; insert (p. 39)

portent [pôr' tent] *n.* warning or indication of what is to come; esp. of something momentous or calamitous (p. 57)

visage [viz' ij] *n.* face or facial expression of a person (p. 37)

Active Reading

Julius Caesar Act 2

In Act 2, characters make decisions that affect the play's outcome. Use the boxes below to record four important decisions from Act 2. Briefly explain the reason for each decision and predict its possible consequence.

Decision	Reason	Possible consequence
Brutus decides to join the conspiracy.	He fears that Caesar will become a tyrant.	He could be punished for his actions.

Decision	Reason	Possible consequence

Decision	Reason	Possible consequence

Decision	Reason	Possible consequence

Responding

Julius Caesar Act 2

Personal Response

What are your feelings toward Caesar at this point in the play?

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. How does Brutus justify the plot against Caesar? What does this justification suggest about Brutus's values?

2. Why does Brutus want to spare Antony's life? What is his opinion of Antony?

3. How does Portia convince Brutus to disclose his secret to her? What is your impression of their relationship?

4. Why is Calphurnia afraid to let Caesar go to the Senate House? Does Caesar seem to share her fear? Explain.

5. What arguments does Decius make to change Caesar's mind? Which of Caesar's personality traits make him vulnerable to Decius's arguments?

Responding

Julius Caesar Act 2

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

6. Which of the two appears to have the better understanding of human nature, Brutus or Cassius? Explain.

7. Which three events in Act 2 serve to increase the level of suspense in the play? How?

Literature and Writing

Behind Every Great Man . . .

Shakespeare introduces Portia and Calphurnia in Act 2. How are these two women alike? How are they different? What do their relationships with their husbands reveal about Brutus and Caesar? Write one or two paragraphs comparing and contrasting these two women's relationships with their husbands.

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

In the **Focus Activity** on page 20, you recalled the most difficult decision you have had to make. With your group, discuss Brutus's decision to join the conspiracy. Did his decision involve any of the same factors that affected your decision? If so, what factors? Do you think that he made the right choice? In your group, come to a consensus and share your conclusions with the class.

Music Connection

Write a rap verse or two based on the three warnings that Caesar receives on the ides of March. Perform the rap for the class. You may wish to have different students perform particular lines and to include a chorus as well as musical accompaniment. You may also wish to write Caesar's response in the form of a rap.



Save your work for your portfolio.

Before You Read

Julius Caesar Act 3

FOCUS ACTIVITY

What is the most moving formal speech you have ever heard or read? Why did it make a lasting impression?

QuickWrite

Write a brief paragraph describing the speech and explaining why it made such an impression on you.

Setting a Purpose

Read to find out how important a speech is in influencing the outcome of *Julius Caesar*.

BACKGROUND

Did You Know?

Shakespeare based *Julius Caesar* on an English translation of *Parallel Lives* by the Greek writer Plutarch. This work contains paired biographies of Greek and Roman historical figures, including Caesar, Brutus, Antony, and Cicero. Plutarch was especially interested in his subjects' character and motives. In the play, Shakespeare generally followed Plutarch's portrayal of the historical figures, but he did make subtle changes. For example, Plutarch reveals that Cassius enjoyed making jokes and that Brutus hesitated to join the conspiracy because it would put so many lives in danger. In Shakespeare's play, Cassius is always serious; Brutus cares only about whether Caesar deserves to die. Antony's magnificent public speech in Act 3 is mainly Shakespeare's creation. In Plutarch's work, he describes it in a few sentences.

Irony in *Julius Caesar*

Julius Caesar contains examples of the three types of irony. **Dramatic irony** occurs when the audience or reader knows something that a character does not know. For example, the reader knows that Cassius sent the letters to Brutus anonymously, but Brutus believes that they are from Roman citizens. **Situational irony** occurs when what actually happens is the opposite of what is expected or appropriate. For example, Caesar expects to be crowned king at the Senate, but instead he is assassinated. **Verbal irony** occurs when a writer or speaker says one thing but really means its opposite. For example, Antony says that, compared to Brutus, he is not an orator, but Antony's speech clearly shows that he is. Verbal irony is especially prominent in Antony's public speech in Act 3. Look for examples as you read the speech.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

bequeath [bi kwēth'] v. to give or leave (property) by a will (p. 89)

decree [di krē'] n. decision or order issued by a court (p. 67)

legacy [leg' ə sē] n. property bequeathed by will (p. 89)

meet [mēt] adj. proper (p. 91)

prostrate [pros' trāt] adj. face downward on the ground in humility, adoration, or submission (p. 73)

redress [ri dres'] v. to correct and compensate for (p. 67)

unassailable [un' ə sã' lə bəl] adj. that cannot be denied, disputed, or questioned (p. 69)

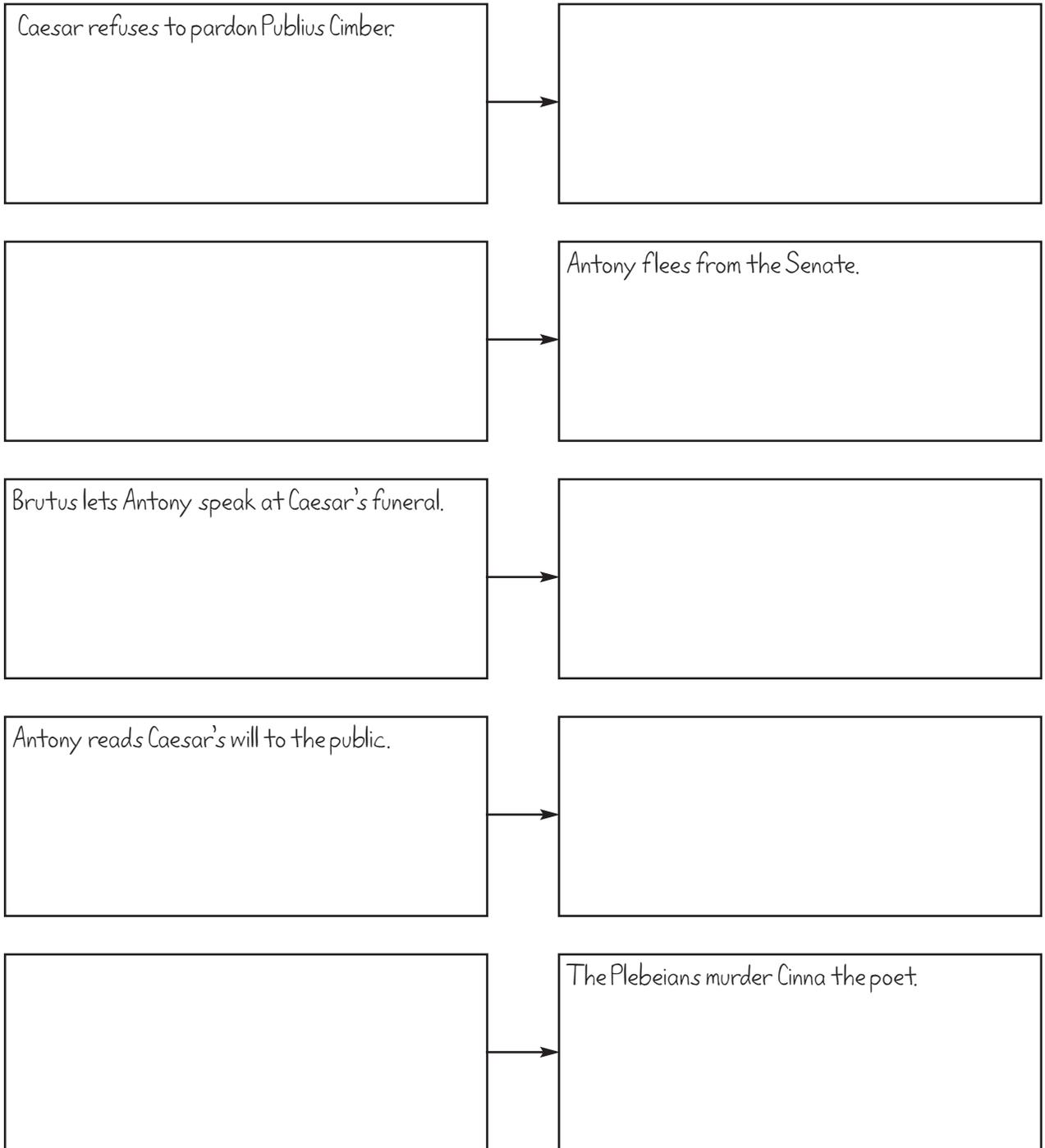
Active Reading

Julius Caesar Act 3

In a play events are often linked together by cause and effect. These causes and effects move the plot forward. Events can have more than one cause and more than one effect. The following graphic lists events in Act 3 of *Julius Caesar*. As you read, fill in the missing cause or effect of each event.

Causes

Effects



Responding

Julius Caesar Act 3

Personal Response

Which incident in Act 3 affected you the most? Explain.

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. Describe Caesar's response to the request to pardon Publius Cimber. Why did the conspirators make the request at that time?

2. What surprises Caesar most when he is attacked? Why was it so surprising to him?

3. How does Antony behave toward the conspirators immediately after Caesar's murder? What motivates his behavior?

4. Why does Brutus allow Antony to speak at Caesar's funeral? What assumption does he make about Antony?

5. How does the crowd react to Brutus's and Antony's funeral speeches? What do these reactions suggest about the people in the crowd?

Responding

Julius Caesar Act 3

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

6. What does Cassius's attempt to dissuade Brutus from letting Antony speak at Caesar's funeral imply? What purpose does this warning serve in advancing the plot?

7. In Antony's eulogy to Caesar, he repeats the refrain that "Brutus is an honorable man." Of what literary device is this an example? Why is its use effective?

Literature and Writing

Cassius Speaks

As Brutus begins to explain his actions, part of the crowd goes off to hear Cassius speak. Write a formal speech for Cassius to deliver. Before you begin, review his earlier dialogue to get a sense of his speaking style. Notice how he justifies Caesar's murder to Brutus and other members of the conspiracy.

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

In the **Focus Activity** on page 24, you explained why a speech left a lasting impression on you. In your group, analyze Brutus's speech on page 83 and Antony's speech on page 87 according to the following devices:

- *invention*—advancing logical, ethical, and emotional arguments
- *arrangement*—the structure of the arguments
- *style*—the selection of original words and phrases to express the arguments

Then, as a group, decide which speech is more effective, giving your criteria for evaluation.

Listening and Speaking

Choose a partner and take turns reading Antony's speech aloud. As your partner speaks, take note of his or her gestures, tone of voice, and expression. After discussing your observations together, create a list of speaking tips that would help someone deliver the speech effectively.



Save your work for your portfolio.

Before You Read

Julius Caesar Acts 4 and 5

FOCUS ACTIVITY

Can serious conflict ever be resolved without bloodshed? What are some of the ways in which warring factions can end their conflict?

Discuss

With your class, discuss ways in which the conflict between Antony and Brutus might be resolved. Then, arriving at a consensus, make a prediction as to how you think the play might end.

Setting a Purpose

Read to find out how the civil conflict in *Julius Caesar* ends.

BACKGROUND

Did You Know?

Antony used Caesar's will as a tool to manipulate the public. Yet the will was a mixed blessing for him. Instead of naming Antony heir, Caesar chose Octavius, his great-nephew. The two men could hardly have been more different: Antony, a gregarious and imposing general, and Octavius, a delicate nineteen-year-old. The senators, led by Cicero, supported Octavius. Cicero did not join in the conspiracy, but he approved of Caesar's assassination and called for Antony's death also. Octavius turned out to be a shrewd politician. When the senators later turned against Octavius, he joined Antony and Lepidus. The alliance split control of Rome's territory in three ways. To pay off troops, they confiscated the estates of many senators and knights, beginning a reign of terror in which thousands perished. Octavius later became Rome's first emperor and assumed the name Augustus.

Tragedy and the Tragic Hero

A **tragedy** is a drama in which the main character, or **tragic hero**, suffers a downfall. Traditionally, the hero is a person of high rank. His or her downfall usually results from an error in judgment or a fatal weakness or flaw, such as excessive ambition. Critics have long debated whether Julius Caesar or Brutus is the tragic hero of Shakespeare's play. Although Caesar is the title character, he appears only in a few scenes and is killed in Act 3, the middle of the play.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

apparition [ap' ə rish' ən] *n.* ghost; specter; phantom (p. 127)

chastisement [chas tīz' mənt] *n.* punishment or reprimand (p. 111)

disconsolate [dis kon' sə lit] *adj.* without cheer, hope, or comfort (p. 143)

misconstrue [mis' kən strōō'] *v.* to mistake the meaning or intention of; misinterpret (p. 145)

repose [ri pōz'] *n.* relaxation, as after exertion or activity; rest (p. 125)

tarry [tar' ē] *v.* to remain in a place; stay, especially longer than one expected (p. 151)

tidings [tī' dingz] *n.* news; information (p. 119)

Active Reading

Julius Caesar Acts 4 and 5

After you read each scene listed below, answer the question with a prediction about what will happen later in the play and write your reason for making the prediction. When you finish reading the play, write the actual outcome.

Act 4, Scene 1

Question: Will Antony or Octavius take charge of the campaign against their enemies?
Prediction: _____
Reason for prediction: _____
Actual outcome: _____

Act 4, Scene 2

Question: Will Brutus and Cassius be able to resolve their differences?
Prediction: _____
Reason for prediction: _____
Actual outcome: _____

Act 4, Scene 3

Question: Will Brutus's plan to defeat Octavius and Antony at Philippi succeed?
Prediction: _____
Reason for prediction: _____
Actual outcome: _____

Act 5, Scene 2

Question: Will Brutus surrender peacefully to Octavius and Antony?
Prediction: _____
Reason for prediction: _____
Actual outcome: _____

Responding

Julius Caesar Acts 4 and 5

Personal Response

What thoughts went through your mind as you finished reading this play?

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. Why do Brutus and Cassius quarrel in Act 4? In your opinion, who is more at fault?

2. How do the battle plans of Cassius and Brutus differ? What does Cassius's yielding to Brutus's judgment suggest about Cassius's character?

3. What belief does Cassius express to Messala before the battle? How might this belief have influenced Cassius's later decision to take his own life?

4. What supernatural experiences does Brutus have in Sardis and Philippi? How does he interpret these experiences?

5. How do Antony and Octavius respond to Brutus's death at the end of the play? Why might they have responded that way?

Responding

Julius Caesar Acts 4 and 5

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

6. Is the play mistitled, and should it have been called “The Tragedy of Brutus”? What is the most compelling argument for why the play is titled as it is?

7. In the **Focus Activity** on page 28, you discussed ways in which the conflict between Antony and Brutus might be resolved. What attributes of Brutus’s character made the outcome of the play inevitable?

Literature and Writing

Write a Review of *Julius Caesar*

Write a review of *Julius Caesar*, discussing the play’s strengths and weaknesses. How well did Shakespeare organize his plot? Are the characters vivid and believable? Is the dialogue interesting? Support your analysis with quotations from the play and references to specific scenes.

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

Which character is the real hero of *Julius Caesar*? Does the play have more than one hero? Review the definitions of tragedy and tragic hero on page 28 before you discuss these questions with your group. You might also compare Shakespeare’s characters with the heroes of other plays you have read. Share your conclusions with the class.

Interdisciplinary Activity: History

With a partner, create a multimedia exhibit on some aspect of Julius Caesar’s life and career. You might wish to focus on his military exploits, the calendar he introduced, his political reforms, the conspiracy to murder him, or daily life in Rome during his rule. Include photographs, maps, time lines, or other visual media in your exhibit.



Save your work for your portfolio.

Plutarch

from The Life of Caesar

Before You Read

Focus Question

Have you ever had a bad feeling about an upcoming event in your life? How did it affect your behavior?

Background

Plutarch, a Greek writer, was born about a century after Julius Caesar's assassination. His most famous work is *Parallel Lives*. It includes the biographies of Caesar, Brutus, Antony, and Cicero. Plutarch arranged his biographical portraits in pairs, emphasizing similarities between Greek and Roman historical figures.

Responding to the Reading

1. What strange occurrences led Caesar to be concerned for his safety? Which personality traits may have influenced him to put aside his concern?

2. Why does Plutarch say that Caesar's fate seems to have been unavoidable? What evidence in the selection would contradict this view?

3. How does Caesar react to the attack on him? What impression of Caesar do you get from Plutarch's description of the attack?

4. According to Plutarch, what is the most remarkable "human" coincidence that occurred after Caesar's death? Why might Plutarch have chosen to emphasize such a coincidence?

5. **Making Connections** Compare and contrast Plutarch's and Shakespeare's accounts of the reaction of Rome's citizens to Caesar's assassination. How are they alike? How are they different?

Literature Groups

Does Plutarch seem to be more sympathetic to Caesar or the conspirators, or are his feelings toward them neutral? Discuss this question in your group. Share your conclusions with the class.

Mark Twain

The Killing of Julius Caesar “Localized”

Before You Read

Focus Question

In your opinion, are newspaper accounts free of bias? Why or why not?

Background

Mark Twain was the pen name of Samuel Langhorne Clemens (1835–1910), one of the most popular American authors. In this sketch, he parodies nineteenth-century newspaper articles.

Responding to the Reading

1. What does Twain say he would have done had he seen the dying Caesar? At what fault of reporters is he poking fun?

2. What source does Twain claim for the report of Caesar’s assassination? Why is this unrealistic?

3. Describe the style of the report’s opening paragraph. How does this paragraph differ from a typical opening paragraph in a contemporary crime report?

4. Why would Twain have added the word “localized” to the title of this sketch?

5. **Making Connections** Why might Twain have chosen to base his parody of journalism on Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*?

Speaking and Listening

With a partner, write a TV news broadcast that parodies Caesar’s assassination or another significant event in the play. Announce the news in the style typical of today’s newscasters. You may videotape the performance, if you wish.

Robert F.
Kennedy

A Eulogy to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Before You Read

Focus Question

What are some possible consequences of the assassination of an important political leader?

Background

Robert F. Kennedy, the brother of President John F. Kennedy, was running for president at the time of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination. Robert Kennedy himself was assassinated in June 1968, two months after King died.

Responding to the Reading

1. What effect does Kennedy fear the assassination of King will have on his audience?

2. What personal experience does Kennedy recount to convince his audience that he understands their feelings?

3. What message did Kennedy seek to convey by the quote from Aeschylus?

4. Which paragraphs of the speech feature the use of repetition? To what is Kennedy appealing in the use of this technique?

5. Does Kennedy's speech remind you more of Brutus's or Antony's in Act 5? Explain.

Learning For Life

Interview someone you know who remembers King's assassination. Ask him or her how he or she reacted to the news and the lessons he or she learned during this turbulent period in our nation's history.

Chinua Achebe | **The Voter**

Before You Read

Focus Question

How are ordinary citizens affected by corrupt elections?

Background

Chinua Achebe is one of Africa’s most distinguished writers. Born in 1930, he grew up in a village in eastern Nigeria. His first novel, *Things Fall Apart*, published in 1958, has been highly acclaimed as a classic.

Responding to the Reading

1. What services does Roof provide for Marcus Ibe? Why is Roof valuable to Marcus?

2. How has Marcus changed since he gained political office? How do the villagers respond to this change?

3. Why does a worker from the rival campaign offer Roof five pounds to vote against Marcus? What internal conflict does Roof experience?

4. How does Roof resolve the conflict at the end of the story?

5. In what way are the villagers in Achebe’s story and the Roman citizens portrayed in *Julius Caesar* alike?

Writing a Dialogue

Imagine that Ibe lost the election by one vote and that he suspects that Roof’s nullified vote caused the loss. Write a brief dialogue based on a heated encounter between the two men that occurs after the election.

Garrett Hongo

Sandra Cisneros

The Legend *and* Geraldo No Last Name

Before You Read

Focus Question

Why do many people feel it is important to be remembered after they are gone?

Background

Garrett Hongo and Sandra Cisneros have both written extensively about their ethnic origins. Hongo, a Japanese American poet and editor, was born in Hawaii. Sandra Cisneros is a Mexican American poet and fiction writer who writes about growing up in Chicago.

Responding to the Reading

1. In “The Legend,” what has the old man just finished doing before he is shot? What does the poem suggest about the circumstances of his life?

2. Why is the speaker of “The Legend” ashamed? How has the man’s death affected the speaker?

3. What can’t the narrator of “Geraldo No Last Name” explain to the authorities? Why wouldn’t they understand?

4. How would you describe the style of “Geraldo No Last Name”? Why might Cisneros have chosen this style for her story?

5. Compare and contrast the victims in these selections with the title character of Shakespeare’s drama.

Personal Writing

Write a paragraph about a relative or friend who has died. How do your memories of this person enrich your life? What would you like others to know about him or her?