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Prestwick House
Literature
Teaching Unit
Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



Julius Caesar

by William Shakespeare

- Learning objectives
- Study Guide with short-answer questions
- Background information
- Vocabulary in context
- Multiple-choice test
- Essay questions
- Literary terms



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Julius Caesar

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. define the terms “tragedy” and “tragic hero.”
2. appreciate the multiple dimensions in a Shakespearean work by writing two paragraphs. One paragraph will argue that Julius Caesar is the tragic hero of this work, while the second paragraph will argue that Brutus is the tragic hero.
3. identify the major themes in this play
4. discuss the ways in which language is used by the characters in this play to persuade, distort the truth, humiliate, and flatter.
5. identify the qualities, both strengths and weaknesses, for each of these characters: Julius Caesar, Brutus, Antony, Cassius, and Octavius Caesar.
6. compare and contrast the two female characters: Portia and Calpurnia.
7. appreciate and understand Shakespearean language.
8. define monarchy and republicanism.

Julius Caesar

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Debate the following point: The assassination of Julius Caesar is, or is not, a virtuous act.
2. Why is Antony's speech more effective than Brutus' speech?
3. Some people say that this play should be called "The Tragedy of Marcus Brutus." Argue both sides of this question.
4. Present proof that Julius Caesar is the tragic hero of this play.
5. Define the following terms and relate them to this play:
 - A. idealism
 - B. pragmatism
 - C. opportunism
 - D. tragedy
 - E. humors
 - F. asides
 - G. soliloquies
 - H. omens and portents
 - I. monarchy
 - J. republicanism
6. Do a character profile for each of the following. Mention strengths and weaknesses for each.
 - A. Julius Caesar
 - B. Brutus
 - C. Antony
 - D. Cassius
 - E. Octavius
7. Who do you think makes a better ruler—an idealist like Brutus or a pragmatist like Octavius? Give some reasons.
8. Prove how friendship is an important theme that runs throughout this play.

Julius Caesar

Act I, Scene I – Rome. A Street.

VOCABULARY

beseech – to advise
cobbler – a clumsy worker
cull – to choose
exalted – elevated
knave – one who is of low-status, unskilled
neats-leather – cowhide
servile – subservient, menial

1. At the very start of the scene, Flavius is yelling to the commoners. Put Flavius' first five lines into modern speech.

2. Puns and word play are a popular part of Shakespeare's plays. Identify and explain the puns the cobbler uses.

3. Flavius asks why the cobbler is out of his shop. What is the cobbler's response?

4. How do the Tribunes, Marullus and Flavius, react to this word play?

14. What is noticeably different about Casca’s dialogue in comparison with Caesar’s or Brutus’?

15. Casca describes the scene in which Caesar refuses the crown. How does the crowd respond after Caesar’s third refusal? What happens to Caesar?

16. What two physical ailments of Caesar’s are mentioned in this scene?

17. What does Caesar say when he comes to?

18. In response to the “falling sickness,” what is the meaning of Cassius’ sarcasm?

19. What happens to Marullus and Flavius? Why?

6. What does Cassius suggest the conspirators do that Brutus disagrees with?

7. Cassius recognizes that Antony should die too, but Brutus vetoes this. Why?

8. As the conspirators are meeting, a clock strikes. What literary term is illustrated by including a clock in this scene?

9. There is some concern that Caesar, having grown superstitious lately, may not leave his house the following day. How does Decius say he can manipulate Caesar? What does this say of Caesar's personality?

10. What is Brutus' answer when Portia asks why he has been behaving strangely lately? What is her response to this?

11. To sway Brutus, what action does Portia take to get him to trust her enough to confide in her?
