

Julius Caesar by William Shakespeare

~ Questions on the Play and Essay Topics ~

Complete your answers neatly on a separate sheet of paper. Explain fully your responses to each.

Act 1 Scene 1

1. Describe the setting of the play. Setting is background, time, place, circumstances & scenery.
 2. What might Flavius be referring to when he asks, "...the sign of your profession?" (Lines 4 & 5)
 3. Explain the puns "cobbler, soles, mend, and awl" as they are used in the scene. A pun is a play on words with similar pronunciations but different meanings.
 4. How does this breaking-up-the-party mood in Scene One foreshadow the feelings of the people towards Caesar?
 5. What does this scene reveal about loyalties among Roman citizens towards their leaders?
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Act 1 Scene 2

1. Throughout the scene, Caesar speaks several times. Look over his lines carefully and tell what is revealed about Caesar's attitudes and beliefs through his own words? What is *your* impression of Caesar?
 2. As the conversation between Brutus and Cassius begins, Brutus is troubled by something, but doesn't say what. How do lines 85 through 89 change Cassius' tone?
 3. Patrick Henry is famous for a 1778 speech in which he demanded, "Give me liberty or give me death." Brutus' words in lines 95 through 96 have a similar message. What is it?
 4. In lines 97 through 138, Cassius claims that Caesar is weak and not fit to be a king. Do *you* agree? Is *political* strength based on *physical* strength?
 5. What clever techniques and words does Cassius use that show his persuasiveness as he recruits Brutus?
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Act 1 Scene 3

1. Why would the conspirators think that the prodigies might give away their assassination plans?
 2. In lines 60 through 80, what is Cassius interpreting the prodigies to mean?
 3. How is Cassius using forged letters to help the conspiracy?
 4. What do the conspirators think Brutus will do for them if he joins? (Lines 162 through 167)
 5. Go over Cassius' lines in this scene. How would you describe his attitude and mood?
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Act 2 Scene 1

1. What does Brutus think will happen if Caesar is crowned? (Lines 10 through 36)
 2. If we were to take lines 64 through 65 literally, how long has it been since Brutus slept?
 3. As the conspirators meet and discuss their plans, how is Brutus different than the others? What do you think they might decide if he were not there? (Lines 124 through 203)
 4. What is meant by the "voluntary wound" Portia speaks of on line 323? What does this reveal about Portia's character?
 5. Describe the relationship of Brutus and Portia based on their conversation in this scene.
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Act 2 Scene 2

1. Caesar refers to himself as "Caesar." He does not use "I" or "me." Why? What does this reveal about him?
2. The warnings so far are many: soothsayers' "Beware the Ides of March," Caesar's suspicion of Cassius, the prodigies, the meteor shower, Calpurnia's dream, and Augurs' reports. What more does this tell us about Caesar?
3. How is Calpurnia treated in this scene by both Caesar and Decius? Give specific quotes to support your answer.
4. How do we know that Caesar trusts Decius, based on the conversation they have in this scene?
5. How does Caesar feel about death? (Lines 34 through 39)

Act 2 Scene 3

1. Why is Scene 3 included in the play? Why is it important?
 2. Caesar is assassinated in Act 3. Therefore, what does this scene further tell us of Caesar's attitude, beliefs, and personality?
 3. Speculate as to how and when Artemidorus obtained his information?
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Act 2 Scene 4

1. What clues do we have that Portia is nervous?
 2. Speculate as to how and when Portia obtained her information about the conspiracy?
 3. What does Portia think of the conspiracy, and how does she feel about her husband's part in it?
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Act 3 Scene 1

1. Why do *all* the conspirators stab Caesar?
 2. As he is being killed, Caesar says, "Et tu, Brute? - Then fall Caesar!" What could be going through his mind at that point? What might Brutus be thinking at the same time?
 3. Explain Antony's actions and words after the assassination.
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Act 3 Scene 2

1. Tell about Brutus' speech - the purpose, his tone, his effectiveness, etc. Do you think it is a good speech?
 2. Analyze Antony's speech for purpose, tone, methods, effectiveness, etc. Is it a good speech?
 3. What image does Shakespeare present of the citizens of Rome in this scene? Explain and provide examples.
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Act 3 Scene 3

1. In what ways is Cinna's scene a horror scene?
 2. In what ways is the scene a comedy?
 3. What is *your* feeling of the scene?
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Act 4 Scene 1

1. What is Antony's main motive at the end of Scene 1? How do we know?
 2. How could this scene change your image of Antony?
 3. What impressions do you get of Octavius and Lepidus in this scene? Why?
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Act 4 Scene 2 and Scene 3

1. What might have happened if Cassius and Brutus remained outside to argue?
 2. Describe the manner in which Cassius and Brutus speak to each other in this scene.
 3. What is the argument all about? Who "wins?"
 4. Has Brutus seen a ghost? How can you explain the incident?
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Act 5 Scene 1 and Scene 2

1. What have been the military strategies of both sides up to this point? (You may have to look back to previous scenes - Act 4 Scene 1 & Act 4 Scene 3)
 2. At this point in the play, who do you hope will win? Why?
 3. Before the battle begins, the four generals exchange insults. In your opinion, who wins that battle of insults?
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Act 5 Scene 3

1. Was it necessary for Cassius to kill himself? Why did he do it?
2. Brutus mourns Cassius and says he owes more tears than he can pay. Considering what they have been through, do you think Brutus is right?
3. Does Cassius' death mark the end of the Conspiracy? Why or why not?

Act 5 Scene 4 and Scene 5

1. Why did Lucilius pose as Brutus? What does this tell us about him?
 2. What might be Brutus' alternatives to suicide?
 3. Analyze Antony's final speech over Brutus' body. Is he sincere?
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Julius Caesar Essay Topics

Choose from the following seven topics.

Provide line number, scene and act of any quotes you use in your essay. For example: "The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, But in ourselves, that we are underlings." (1.2, 147-148) This shows the quote is from Act One, Scene 2, lines 147 and 148. This is a formal essay. Be sure to include the title of the play and the playwright in your introduction: *Julius Caesar* by William Shakespeare. Your essay should be organized in five-paragraph format.

1. **Sacrifice**: Men and women throughout history have sacrificed their own lives. Many who did not were willing and prepared to die for what they believed. In a well-organized essay, analyze the deaths in the play. Analyze the **philosophy** and **reasons** behind these deaths and suicides.

You can write about Caesar, Portia, Cassius, Titinius and/or Brutus. Cato & Cinna the Poet also died in the play. You may write about some or all of these characters. They all died or were killed. Some may argue that Caesar did not sacrifice himself, but in some ways, just being in a position of leadership can force a person to sacrifice their safety and privacy. You can also analyze characters who risked themselves, such as the other conspirators, Lucilius in Act 5, Scene 4, Artemidorus with the letter - all were willing to put themselves in danger for something they believed in... Caesar's death is on page 99, Brutus page 207, Portia page 161, Cassius page 193, Titinius 197, Cato 199, Cinna the Poet 137.

2. **Women**: Calphurnia and Portia are the only two female characters in the play. In a well-organized essay, compare the women, analyze their roles and reveal what they contribute to the play. How are these women important in the story?

You can write about the readers' impression of these two women - they both spoke their minds to their husbands. You can read through the scenes involving Calphurnia and Portia specifically & take note of their words & action and analyze their characters. Look at their relationships, their attitudes, what their presence tells us about the play, other characters and the time period. Calphurnia is in Act 1, Scene 2 briefly, then again in Act 2, Scene 2. Portia is in Act 2, Scenes 1 and 4 and is mentioned again in Act 4, Scene 3.

3. **The Supernatural**: In a well-organized essay, analyze the role the supernatural has in the play. Why did Shakespeare include supernatural elements, how do these affect the play, and what is revealed about the characters through the use of the supernatural? What does it teach modern readers about the time period of the play and about human nature?

For this essay, you do not need to prove that the supernatural elements are true or false. You should instead analyze what they might mean or represent. There are quite a few elements you can analyze - Caesar's belief that a person's touch can cure infertility, the soothsayer's future predictions, Caesar's augurers, the prodigies listed in Act 1, Scene 3 (people on fire, lion in the city, owl out in daylight) and the Ghost of Caesar in Act 4, Scene 3. What can each symbolize? Why might the Romans believe what they are seeing and hearing? These supernatural elements have symbolic meaning.

4. **Friendship**: Are Caesar and Antony really true friends? Cassius and Brutus? How is friendship defined through the characters in the play? Which of Shakespeare's characters can truly be called friends? Analyze the friendships in the play.

You can also look at the marriages of Brutus & Portia and Caesar & Calphurnia. Decide what you think are the characteristics of a good friendship, and judge the relationships in the play by your standards. Tell if they are truly friends, or perhaps is one using the other? Three of the best to analyze might be: Brutus & Caesar, Brutus & Cassius, Antony & Caesar.

5. **Today's World:** What similarities or connections can you find between the world of *Julius Caesar* and our world today? How are war, politics, corruption, citizens, assassinations, opinions, communication, government and society the same? Has society evolved and changed in two-thousand years? What lessons about human nature can be revealed through your analysis?

You can think about public opinion - are we like the ancient Romans today? Are we emotional, gullible and reactive to what we hear and see? Are politicians today as corrupt and greedy as some of the politicians in the play? Look at recent wars and conflicts in the world; compare to the battle we see in Acts 4 & 5. Are citizens treated fairly by leaders - today and in 44 BC? What about the role of women and the nature of relationships? Choose some points to focus on & determine if we are better or worse than the Ancient Romans.

6. **Brutus & Antony:** Compare and/or contrast the characters of Brutus and Antony from the play. Point out similarities and/or differences in the two men. Consider all aspects of Brutus and Antony including their positions in society, ways of life, professions, attitudes, behavior, words, relationships and how they are seen by others.

These two are the main protagonists of the play. Audiences find that they are rooting for both of them at times. Why? What is it about Marcus Brutus and Mark Antony that makes them appealing historical characters? You can look back at their speeches and actions, consider their intelligence, their behavior and how other characters seem to respect each man. You may even use knowledge from your World History class in this essay.

7. **Power:** The play is about a struggle to maintain or gain power. The tragic nature of the play can teach a lesson about the abuse or misuse of power and the dangers of obtaining and wielding power over others. What can Shakespeare's tragedy *Julius Caesar* teach its audience about power? Look at how Caesar, Antony & Cassius use and abuse their power over others in the play. Analyze how they manipulate others, lie, are arrogant and stubborn, etc. Consider how their actions affect others.