



# JULIUS CAESAR

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE  
INFORMATION PACK

## ABOUT OUR EDUCATION WORK

We want children and young people to enjoy the challenge of Shakespeare and achieve more as a result of connecting with his work. Central to our education work is our manifesto for Shakespeare in schools, *Stand up for Shakespeare*. We know that children and young people can experience Shakespeare in ways that excite, engage and inspire them. We believe that young people get the most out of Shakespeare when they:

- Do Shakespeare on their feet - exploring the plays actively as actors do
- See it Live - participate as members of a live audience
- Start it Earlier - work on the plays from a younger age

We also believe in the power of ensemble; a way of working together in both the rehearsal room and across the company enabling everyone's ideas and voices to be heard. Artistic Director, Michael Boyd encapsulates this vision for ensemble in his rehearsal room where actors are encouraged to try out different interpretations of scenes before deciding together on what will be presented to an audience in the final performance.

## ABOUT THIS PACK

This pack contains background information and a glossary for teachers and students who are studying or watching a performance of *Julius Caesar* or *I, Cinna (The Poet)*.

Download our other packs for drama and discussion activities.

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# PLOT SYNOPSIS

**Julius Caesar** returns to Rome in triumph, having defeated **Pompey** and his sons. The Roman republic is prepared to heap him with new honours, causing concern and dismay among some senators who fear that too much power is held by one man. A **soothsayer** warns Caesar to 'beware the Ides of March'. The people offer Caesar the crown three times, but he refuses.

The senator **Caius Cassius** plots a conspiracy to murder Caesar, enlisting the support of **Marcus Brutus**. Brutus has misgivings but is persuaded that Caesar's death is necessary for the good of the republic. However, he refuses to agree that **Mark Antony**, Caesar's close friend, should also be killed.

The night before the Ides of March, there are terrible storms and omens. Caesar's wife **Calphurnia** dreams that she sees his statue running with blood and begs him not to go to the Senate. However, persuaded by **Decius Brutus**, he does go, and is stabbed to death by the conspirators, including Brutus and Cassius. The people of Rome are distraught.

At Caesar's funeral, Brutus addresses the people and successfully explains the conspirators' motives. However, Mark Antony speaks next and turns the mob against the conspirators, who are forced to flee Rome.

Civil war develops. Mark Antony and Caesar's nephew, **Octavius**, take command of Rome and lead an army against the conspirators. Caesar's ghost appears to Brutus at night in his tent, saying that he will see him again at Philippi. Brutus and Cassius are defeated at Philippi where they kill themselves rather than be captured.

# JULIUS CAESAR – THE CHARACTERS

## CAESAR'S HOUSEHOLD

JULIUS CAESAR	Ruler of the Roman Government
CALPHURNIA	Caesar's wife

## CONSPIRATORS

MARCUS BRUTUS	A respected and important politician, with the Roman people's interests at heart
CASSIUS	The main organiser of the plot against Caesar
CASCA	The first to strike Caesar
DECIUS BRUTUS	Persuades Caesar to come to the Senate House, where he will be killed
CINNA	The first to celebrate when Caesar is dead
TREBONIUS	Makes sure that Antony is not present during the assassination
METELLUS CIMBER	Distracts Caesar so the conspirators can get close to him.
CAIUS LIGARIUS	Supporter of Pompey, who Caesar has just defeated

## SENATORS

CICERO	Well known for his skill at speaking. He is later killed in Mark Antony's purge of his enemies
PUBLIUS	Present at the death of Caesar, but not a conspirator
POPILIUS	At the Senate House on the morning of Caesar's death, but he leaves before the event

## TRIUMVIRS AFTER CAESAR'S DEATH

MARK ANTONY	Politician, General, and loyal friend to Caesar
OCTAVIUS CAESAR	Adopted son of Caesar
LEPIDUS	The third triumvir – despised by Antony

## TRIBUNES OF THE PEOPLE

FLAVIUS	Supporter of Pompey, who tells the people of Rome to stop celebrating at the beginning of the play
MARULLUS	As Flavius. They are both put to death for taking scarves off Caesar's statues

## **CITIZENS OF ROME**

PORTIA	Brutus' wife
LUCIUS	Brutus' servant
ARTEMIDORUS	Attempts to warn Caesar of the plot against him
A SOOTHSAYER	Foretells the day on which Caesar will die
CINNA THE POET	Mistaken for Cinna the conspirator, he is killed by the angry crowd
SERVANTS	Caesar, Calphurnia, Antony and Octavius all have servants who play a part in the action
A COBBLER	A drunken celebrator on the day of Caesar's victory
A CARPENTER	Friend to the Cobbler

## **OFFICERS & SOLDIERS OF BRUTUS & CASSIUS**

LUCILIUS	Impersonates Brutus to fool the Soldiers of Antony's army
PINDARUS	Cassius' look-out during the battle
TITINIUS	Closest friend to Cassius; when he finds him dead, Titinius also kills himself
A POET	Tries to prevent Brutus and Cassius from arguing
MESSALA	Brutus' chief messenger during the battle
YOUNG CATO	Son of Cato – a long-time opponent of Caesar's
STRATO	When no-one else will, he helps Brutus to kill himself
CLITUS	Present with Brutus at the end of the fighting, when all hope is lost
DARDANIUS	As Clitus
VOLUMNIUS	As Clitus

# ROMAN HISTORY & CULTURE

## TIMELINE OF CAESAR'S LIFE

Caesar is born on 13 July 100 BC.

- 84 BC Marries first wife, Cornelia
  - 75 BC Captured by Cilician pirates in the Mediterranean Sea. He was held prisoner for 38 days before being ransomed by Miletus. He had great fun with the pirates but as soon as he was set free, he captured nearly all of the pirates, took their property, imprisoned and ultimately crucified them.
  - 73 BC Elected Pontifex
  - 69 BC Cornelia dies
  - 67 BC Marries second wife, Pompeia
  - 65 BC Elected Aedile
  - 63 BC Elected Pontifex Maximus
  - 62 BC Divorces Pompeia
  - 61 BC Becomes Governor of Spain
  - 60 BC Becomes Consul, Caesar forms the first triumvirate with Marcus Licinius Crassus (known as Crassus) and Gnaeus Pompeius (Pompey).  
The Roman historian Livy called this triumvirate 'a conspiracy against the state by its three leading citizens'.  
The triumvirate was sealed when Pompey married Caesar's daughter, Julia, and Caesar himself married Calpurnia, daughter of Crassus' close friend Piso.
  - 58 BC Defeats the Helvetii and the Germans
  - 55 BC Crosses the Rhine and invades Britain
  - 54 BC His daughter Julia (Pompey's wife) dies.  
Defeats the chief of the Britons, Cassivellaunus, in a battle near London.  
The Roman capital of Britain was established at Camulodunum (today: Colchester), with other important settlements at Verulamium (St Albans), Londinium (London) and Eboracum (York).
  - 53 BC Crassus killed in battle with the Parthians in Asia at the Battle of Carrhae.
  - 52 BC Caesar defeats the Gauls under Vercingetorix after a long and bloody war.  
Of the six million Gauls, one million were murdered and another million sold into slavery.
  - 49 BC The Roman Senate orders Caesar to hand over his legions to a new Governor. He refuses, and by crossing the Rubicon into Italy, provokes a Civil War in Rome.
  - 48 BC Caesar's armies defeat Pompey's at the Battle of Pharsalus. Pompey flees to Egypt where he is murdered by his betrayers. The murderers presented Pompey's head to Caesar, who mourned this insult to his former ally and son-in-law, and put the conspirators to death.
  - 45 BC Caesar declared Dictator for Life (see 'From Republic to Empire' on page 6)
- On 15 March 44 BC, Caesar was assassinated.

## FROM REPUBLIC TO EMPIRE

The title 'imperator' was used as far back as 189 BC, long before Julius Caesar, to hail the triumphant leader of a military victory. Others, such as Pompey and Sulla, were called 'imperator' at different times, but Julius Caesar was the first to use it permanently. Julius Caesar took on many highly important and powerful offices and titles in the Republic, making him far more powerful than any previous consul or military leader.

In 45 BC, Julius Caesar was created 'dictator perpetuo' (permanent dictator); he had already been 'pontifex maximus' for many years. The senators of Rome agreed to him taking on this post.

In his will, Caesar left his property and lineage to his adopted son Octavian. Ten years later in 34 BC, Octavian defeated Mark Anthony at Actium, the end of any opposition to his status as emperor.

In 27 BC, Octavian offered to retire from active politics and government, but the Senate asked him to stay on, and gave him lifelong powers and the title of Augustus, almost god-like. His immensely powerful position as 'princeps' and permanent 'imperator' of Rome brought peace and stability.

Augustus prepared his adopted son Tiberius to replace him. The Senate debated the question but eventually Tiberius was made princeps. From this point on, the Roman Republic was unquestionably ruled by emperors who inherited their powers from their predecessor.

## PREDICTING THE FUTURE

'Soothsayer' literally means 'someone who tells the truth', and it refers to someone who is believed to be able to tell the future through supernatural means. Many different religions and cultures have had soothsayers, seers, sybils or prophets (all words with the same meaning) and there are many different ways in which they predict the future.

In Ancient Rome, one important type of soothsayer was known as a 'haruspex' (plural 'haruspices'). A haruspex would predict the future by studying the entrails (innards) of a sacrificed animal. Other important omens which were used to tell the future were lightning strikes and the flight of birds ('augury').

In *Julius Caesar*, the soothsayer warns Caesar to 'beware the Ides of March', but Caesar dismisses his warning. The Roman writer Suetonius described the various warnings and omens that foreshadowed Caesar's death:

Shortly before his death, as he was told, the herds of horses which he had dedicated to the river Rubicon when he crossed it, and had let loose without a keeper, stubbornly refused to graze and wept copiously.

Again, when he was offering sacrifice, the soothsayer Spurinna warned him to beware of danger, which would come not later than the Ides of March; and on the day before the Ides of that month a little bird called the king-bird flew into the Hall of Pompey with a sprig of laurel, pursued by others of various kinds from the grove hard by, which tore it to pieces in the hall.

In fact the very night before his murder he dreamt now that he was flying above the clouds, and now that he was clasping the hand of Jupiter; and his wife Calpurnia thought that the pediment of their house fell, and that her husband was stabbed in her arms; and on a sudden the door of the room flew open of its own accord.

(From *The Lives of the Caesars*)

It was seen as an act of arrogance not to heed the words of a soothsayer. Omens were taken very seriously in Roman culture and were an important part of decision-making.

## THE ROMAN CALENDAR & THE IDES OF MARCH

In Roman times, the calendar was organised into 12 months, which were in turn arranged around three 'reference' days: the Kalends, the Nones and the Ides.

- **Kalends:** 1st day of the month
- **Nones:** the 7th day in March, May, July, and October; the 5th in the other months
- **Ides:** the 15th day in March, May, July, and October; the 13th in the other months

So 'The Ides of March' means the 15th of March.

The Roman calendar was reformed by Julius Caesar in 46 BC and this new calendar was known as the 'Julian' calendar. It was a big improvement on the previous calendar of 355 days, which needed an extra month inserted every few years to keep it aligned with the natural year (of the Earth going around the Sun).

The Julian calendar was much more stable and was widely used in many parts of the world until it was reformed and became the Gregorian calendar in 1582. It is still used by the Berber people of North Africa - another example of Julius Caesar's immense influence on our world today.



## GLOSSARY

### **Ambition**

Determination to succeed

From the Latin *ambire* 'to go around (canvassing for votes)'

### **Conspiracy**

A secret plan by a group of people

From the Latin *conspirare* 'agree, plot'

### **Corruption**

Fraudulent or dishonest behaviour by those in power.

From the Latin *corrumpere* 'mar, bribe, destroy'

### **Democracy**

Government by the people usually through elected representatives

From Greek *dēmos* 'the people' + *-kratia* 'power, rule'

### **Emperor**

The leader of an empire

From the Latin *imperator* 'military commander'

### **Liberty**

Freedom, especially freedom from state control

From Latin *libertas*, from *liber* 'free'

### **Republic**

A state ruled by the people and their elected representatives, with no monarch

From Latin *respublica*, from *res* 'entity, concern' + *publicus* 'of the people, public'

### **Tyranny**

Oppressive rule

From Latin *turannus* 'lord, master, absolute ruler'

Note how many of these words have Latin origins.

The continuing influence of Roman history and Julius Caesar on our modern-day political life can also be seen in the use of words such as *kaiser* and *tsar* for rulers of Germany and Russia, which both derive from the name 'Caesar'.