

POWER AND DUTY

Playmaking Pack - Resources - Units



ACT 1

UNIT

SUMMARY & QUESTIONS

1

Two Roman Tribunes, FLAVIUS and MARCELLUS scold a group of COMMONERS for their fickle loyalties. Previously the common people have celebrated the triumphs of Pompey (a great Roman General), but now they rejoice at Julius Caesar's victory, having defeated Pompey in battle. They disperse the crowds and begin to take down any tributes to Caesar.

How might we get a sense of the festivities into this opening scene – using sound/music and physicality/movement?

How can we draw attention to the interesting power struggle between the officials (Tribunes) and the commoners? Only two commoners speak, but how many more are there and what are they doing during this exchange?

2

JULIUS CAESAR and some Senators pass through the streets. Caesar asks his friend MARK ANTONY to touch CALPURNIA (his wife) as part of the Feast of Lupercal festivities, believing it will allow her to have children. Caesar is stopped by a SOOTHSAYER who warns Caesar to "beware the Ides of March". Caesar dismisses him and moves on.

How might we establish a sense of authority and hierarchy in the physical positioning?

This is clearly a public scene, but how much of the exchange between Caesar, Calpurnia and Antony can be heard by the other senators and wider crowd?

How do we mark the Soothsayer a being different – someone who stands out from the crowd and able to get Caesar's attention amid the hustle and bustle? Caesar dismisses the warning, but is the dismissal genuine or just for public show?

3

Two Senators BRUTUS and CASSIUS remain behind. Hearing the shouts and cries from the citizens in celebration of Caesar, they share their mistrust of Caesar believing him to be ambitious. They fear that if Caesar is given more power, he will become an oppressive leader.

Brutus and Cassius hear but don't 'see' what's happening offstage with the Caesar and the crowd. How might we make the audience aware of the offstage action and ensure the interrupting cheers are significant?

This is a dangerous conversation to have in public. How much of a risk is Cassius taking approaching Brutus? The crowd cheering are a constant reminder that they could be overheard, how keen is Brutus to have this conversation in public?

UNIT

SUMMARY & QUESTIONS

4

CAESAR and his followers return. Caesar talks to his close friend, MARK ANTONY, and shares his mistrust of CASSIUS. Mark Antony tells him Cassius is 'not dangerous' and they leave.

What prompts Caesar's comments about Cassius? Is it a deeply held dislike, or is it something about the way he is behaving that raises suspicion?

5

BRUTUS and CASSIUS pull aside another Senator named CASCA. They ask him why the citizens were shouting. Casca informs them that the citizens wanted to make Caesar a king and offered him a crown three times, but each time Caesar refused. When alone Cassius reveals he needs to further convince Brutus in order to act against Caesar. He plans to write letters as if from different people, all praising Brutus and warning about Caesar's ambition.

How do Brutus and Cassius respond to the news of Caesar being offered the crown – given that they have just been talking of Caesar's ambition?

What is Casca's attitude towards Caesar? And how does this come across in his recounting of what's just happened?

6

CICERO and CASCA meet in the middle of a storm. Casca is worried that such unusually violent weather must be an ill sign from the gods.

There are many ways of creating and performing a storm – but how can we ensure the audience gets the idea this is a storm like no other?

The characters in this unit (and the next) give vivid descriptions of strange happenings – can we bring those to images to life or how else might we make them clear for the audience's imagination?

7

CASSIUS meets CICERO and CASCA. Cassius compares the storm to Caesar and we learn that Cassius is meeting other Senators who are also worried about Caesar's ambitions for power. CINNA enters and tells them that the other conspirators are ready and waiting. Cassius asks Cinna to distribute the letters he has written where Brutus will find them.

As with unit 6, how might we present or represent the storm? However unlike unit 6, in this unit there is a deeper conversation about the conspiracy – how do we use the energy of the storm high, and still ensure the audience receive the key information about the conspiracy?

How might the 'given circumstances' (the location, the weather, the time of day etc) affect the conversation and physicality of the actors?

ACT 2

UNIT

SUMMARY & QUESTIONS

8

Unable to sleep BRUTUS is thinking over Caesar's dangerous rise to power and admits the only way to stop him is to kill him. His servant LUCIUS finds a letter that has been dropped through the window, it is one of many letters Brutus has found all urging him to act. There is knocking at the door, Brutus sends Lucius to answer it.

This scene gives a vital insight into Brutus' struggle to decide the right course of action. How might we draw out this personal debate and highlight both sides of the argument?

What other factors are influencing his thoughts – the mysterious letters, the storm, the late night visitors?

9

LUCIUS brings news that CASSIUS is at the door with other men, their faces hidden. BRUTUS invites them in and the Senators all agree that in order to save Rome, Caesar must die. Cassius and some others are keen that as Mark Antony is so close to Caesar that he should be assassinated too, but Brutus disagrees saying Mark Antony is powerless without Caesar. The conspirators leave and Brutus urges them to behave as normal so as not to raise attention.

Brutus is the key to the conspirator's success – knowing this, how might it affect them all entering this scene?

Has Brutus already made up his mind before the senators enter or is there a marked moment during this unit? If he has made up his mind before, the others don't know it, so how might we mark the moment when they are all in agreement?

10

BRUTUS' wife PORTIA is worried that he hasn't been sleeping and urges Brutus to tell her what's wrong. At first Brutus is reluctant to share what's on his mind, but in the end he agrees.

Why has Brutus not shared his thoughts with Portia? Is this sudden and unusual behaviour in an otherwise loving and open relationship, or has this been building for some time?

How might your thoughts on their relationship affect the physical relationship on stage – the space between them, physical contact, eye contact?

How might we explore the 'emotional stakes' of the scene? Does Portia's energy match the furious storm or cut against it with a more sensitive appeal to her husband?

UNIT

SUMMARY & QUESTIONS

11

The storm is still raging and CAESAR has been woken up by his wife CALPURNIA having nightmares and calling out in her sleep. He sends a servant to ask the priests to make a sacrifice to the gods and bring him their predictions. Calpurnia tells Caesar about her dream and begs him not to go to the senate for fear her dream will come true and Caesar will be murdered. The servant returns and the priests also advise Caesar to stay at home. Reluctantly Caesar agrees.

This unit is almost a mirror of the previous one – putting them side by side Shakespeare asks the audience to compare the different relationships. How does Caesar’s relationship with Calpurnia differ from that of Brutus and Portia? Are there any similarities?

12

DECIUS BRUTUS comes to escort CAESAR to the senate-house. Caesar tells him of CALPURNIA’s dream and that he will not go. Decius persuades Caesar that Calpurnia has misunderstood the dream and reminds him that today the Senate is making Caesar a king. Caesar agrees that Calpurnia’s dream now seems ‘foolish’ and get ready to leave. *[N.B. remember this is a different character to our main Brutus – this is Decius Brutus NOT Marcus Brutus, easy for us and the audience to get confused.]*

Is Decius alone, or does he come with other senators/officials? How does their presence put pressure on Caesar?

This is another example of Caesar ignoring warnings – the Soothsayer (unit 2), Calpurnia’s dream and the priest’s augury (unit 11) – how might we mark the tension between Caesar duty to his wife and his position as leader?

13

A teacher called ARTEMIDORUS has found out about the plot against Caesar and has written a letter to warn him. He waits hoping to hand Caesar the letter as he passes on his way to the senate-house.

Artemidorus is certain he is uncovered a conspiracy – but how sure is he that Caesar will listen and even if he does read the letter, will he be believed?

What is at risk for Artemidorus? We the audience know he is right, but what might the consequences be for accusing such high profile senators of conspiring to kill Caesar?

14

PORTIA is nervous for Brutus’ safety and tells LUCIUS to go to the senate-house but is unable to tell him why. The SOOTHSAYER enters and when Portia questions him he tells her that he is going to warn Caesar that he may be in danger. Portia panics and sends Lucius to see Brutus and return to her.

At the end of unit 10 Brutus agrees to tell Portia ‘the secrets of his heart’. How much has he actually told her? In this unit she is very anxious about his safety, but how much does she know of Brutus’ plans? And how much does Lucius know?

ACT 3

UNIT

SUMMARY & QUESTIONS

15

A crowd of people has gathered outside the senate-house. The SOOTHSAYER and ARTEMIDORIUS both try to get CAESAR's attention, but the conspirators move Caesar along quickly. As part of the plan, TREBONIUS finds a way of keeping MARK ANTONY out of the way. METALLUS CIMBER begs Caesar to reverse the banishment of his brother and many of the other Senators also plead in his defence. Caesar is fiercely stubborn and when he refuses the conspirators stab him to death.

This unit contains a large number of characters all with different intentions and concerns – can you identify what these are for each? This will prove invaluable for cast to bear in mind throughout the whole scene, especially when they aren't speaking.

That said, how can we ensure that in the midst of a busy scene, we are clear about who/what the audience needs to focus on at any one time?

The whole unit builds towards the major event – the assassination – at the end, how might we manage that suspense – what unspoken communication is happening between the conspirators?

How aware are the conspirators of Artemidorus' knowledge of the plot, if at all?

Caesar's opening line is 'The Ides of March are come.' How confident is he that the terrible prophesies aren't going to come true?

How might we stage the murder itself - is it fast and chaotic? Or much slower and precise? Is it physically realistic or a more symbolic staging?

16

There is a moment of chaos immediately following the assignation of Caesar. BRUTUS urges the conspirators all to be calm. He encourages them all to 'bathe' their hands in Caesar's blood and then they will parade together into the public market-place.

Play with the balance of chaos and stillness, noise and silence. In the immediate aftermath of such a violent act, what is foremost in the conspirators' minds? How in control are they?

Brutus seems to have a huge influence on unifying their focus/attention, how does he achieve this?

UNIT

SUMMARY & QUESTIONS

17

MARK ANTONY enters and although he has heard about what's happened is shocked seeing Caesar's body. To the surprise of all the conspirators Antony calmly shakes them all by the hand. CASSIUS is keen to know whether Antony is on their side, and Antony very cleverly neither shows his support nor his scorn for their actions. Instead he simply asks that they be clear about their motives for killing Caesar and that he is allowed to speak to bring Caesar's body and speak to the citizens of Rome. Cassius is not keen, but Brutus agrees and the conspirators leave.

The text suggests (especially if you take the next unit into consideration too) that Antony's outward actions are at odds with his inner thoughts and feelings. How might we explore that balance in rehearsals? How much of his inner thoughts/feeling does he show to the conspirators? How easy is it to conceal them?

What is going through the minds of the conspirators who have been literally caught red-handed? Does Antony react the way they expect him to?

In unit 9 the conspirators discussed if Antony should die alongside Caesar – and here Antony invites them to kill him too – do they regret their decision not to? Are some tempted to change their mind?

18

MARK ANTONY, once left alone with Caesar's body, now reveals his true grief for the murder of his friend. He asks Caesar to pardon his gentle dealings with the conspirators and pledges to get revenge. A servant of Octavius Caesar (Julius Caesar's nephew) arrives and tells Antony that Octavius is on his way to Rome. Antony tells him to warn Octavius that Rome has become a dangerous place and he should stay away for the moment.

Shakespeare marks very clearly a shift in tone in Antony's language now he is alone, but how might his physicality change?

Antony seems to go through a range of emotions in the one speech – are there ways we can tease out these different emotions in rehearsal and in performance?

Can we discover what he's trying to achieve by speaking these words, rather than remain silent?

Is the news that Octavius Caesar is coming to Rome a surprise to Antony or has this visit been planned in advance? Either way Antony needs to think quickly given the situation.

UNIT

SUMMARY & QUESTIONS

19

BRUTUS addresses a crowd of Roman CITIZENS to tell them of Caesar's ambitions and that he was assassinated for the good of Rome. The Citizens show their support for Brutus and when MARK ANTONY appears they are suspicious of him. As promised Brutus urges the citizens to hear what Antony has to say, while he and CASSIUS leave. Antony uses his skilful oratory and is able to turn the citizens' opinions against Brutus and the conspirators. As the citizens begin to riot, Antony learns that Octavius has arrived in Rome and that Brutus and Cassius have fled in fear.

Arguably the most important character in this unit is the crowd. Both Antony and Brutus use their big speeches to persuade the citizens to their way of thinking.

How easily are they convinced by what they hear?

What are the moments/lines when their opinion shifts? How can we flag those moments clearly to the audience?

Like unit 15, this unit builds until the citizens are so rallied they can no longer stay put and their energy is released in the riot that follows.

20

CINNA THE POET is passing through the streets when he is confronted by the angry mob. They mistake him for one of the conspirators (also called Cinna) and are violent towards him.

In this small but significant moment we see the mob are out of control. Antony's speeches in unit 19 have whipped them up so much that innocent people are now at risk.

What different ways can we physicalize this horrible act to give a real sense of danger and unpredictability in the streets of Rome?

ACT 4

UNIT

SUMMARY & QUESTIONS

21

MARK ANTONY, OCTAVIUS CAESAR and a Roman General called LEPIDUS are meeting to decide which conspirators are to die. When Lepidus leaves to collect Caesar's will Antony criticises him. Octavius and Antony discuss Brutus and Cassius who are gathering military support. They leave to prepare for battle.

Shakespeare counteracts the high energy at the end of Act 3, with this more intimate scene to start Act 4. However, these are military men and they are talking about punishing the conspirators, so how might we convey a sense of tension and preparations for battle? It could be as simple as a military drum beat that pulses throughout, or the addition of war-like props (swords etc).

There is a personal tension between these three men too, even though they are on the same side. Can we identify their attitudes towards each other and make them clear to the audience?

22

BRUTUS is waiting for Cassius. He speaks to one of his officers, LUCILIUS, who describes how Cassius' behaviour has changed towards him. CASSIUS arrives and is angry with Brutus. Brutus insists that they do not argue in front of their armies and invites Cassius into his tent.

Similarly to unit 21, we see the tensions between these two characters, who are meant to be united.

Again, Shakespeare plays with private conversations made public, how does that affect the speakers and those hearing them?

We take another step forward towards war as Shakespeare gives us a clear military tone to this unit. How else can we mark this change for the audience? These are no longer 'senators', they are now 'soldiers'.

23

Inside BRUTUS tent, CASSIUS criticizes Brutus for accusing his friend of taking bribes. Brutus tells Cassius that he has a reputation for taking bribes himself, at which Cassius takes offence and threatens Brutus. After a brief argument they agree to make peace and ask LUCILIUS and TITINIUS to tell the army to set up camp for the night and return with Messala.

The cracks continue to be revealed in this key conversation between Brutus and Cassius. Remind the cast of their earlier conversations together (units 3 & 5). What has changed between them? How does that affect their language and physicality towards each other?

How might the information given in unit 24, of Portia's death, also have an impact on Brutus during this dialogue?

Also, remember time is ticking and they're supposed to be getting ready for a battle. How might a sense of urgency added to the scene affect it?

UNIT

SUMMARY & QUESTIONS

24

Left alone again, BRUTUS reveals to CASSIUS the real reason for his upset – Portia his wife is dead. Cassius is shocked but they are interrupted by the arrival of TITINIUS and MESSALA. There is news that Mark Antony, Lepidus and Octavius have ‘put to death’ one hundred senators (including the famous Cicero). They discuss the plans for battle and, after initial disagreement, settle on marching towards Philippi.

The revelation of Portia’s death happens right at the beginning of this unit and is one verse line split between the two characters. Typically a shared line would invite the actors to be very quick on cues, but in a moment like this it might be worth trying the opposite and placing pauses between them.

How does this news affect Cassius? How does his attitude and behaviour towards Brutus alter after hearing it?

Brutus is clearly caught off guard, when they are interrupted – is he hiding his feelings from Titinius or just trying to ‘pull himself together’?

How do they respond to the news of the conspirators being put to death? How do we feel about it - is this justice for Caesar’s death or revenge?

25

BRUTUS asks two of his officers, VARRO and CLAUDIUS to join him in his tent and as his servant LUCIUS plays some music they soon fall asleep. While they sleep the GHOST of Caesar visits Brutus as warns that he will see him again at Philippi. Brutus wakes up the others but they protest they saw nothing.

Another disturbed night for Brutus. It’s well worth comparing this unit to unit 8 (9&10 too perhaps) – these are the moments we see Brutus at his most vulnerable, before and after the assassination. How do they compare?

The song is not specified, so you can choose something that you feel suits this moment of the play, as well as your design choices (i.e. modern day or historical setting).

In the earlier units, he was visited by hooded conspirators, in a terrible storm, now we have another strange visitor - might we present Caesar’s ghost? Do the audience see it or is it only heard? What other sound or music can we use to enhance the ghostly atmosphere?

ACT 5

UNIT

SUMMARY & QUESTIONS

26

OCTAVIUS and ANTONY are near Philippi with their army when news arrives that BRUTUS and CASSIUS' army is approaching. The leaders of the two forces square up and trade insults and prepare for battle. After Octavius and Antony have gone, Cassius questions their chances of victory and suggests this may be the last time they see each other.

Again another complete change of tone with the beginning of Act 5. The leaders of the two armies square up against each other.

Explore the different physical options for this unit, there are lots of insults and tough talk being exchanged – is that from a distance or are they up in each other's faces?

In their private exchange at the end, there seems to be an edge of fear in Brutus and Cassius, a sense that they know they might lose - Is there a sense of fear displayed at all in front of Antony and Octavius or well hidden behind bravado?

27

The two armies fight and CASSIUS see his troops retreating from the field. Cassius's slave, PINDARUS, enters and suggests they run away as Mark Antony has taken over their camp. Cassius sends TITINIUS to find out more news and while he is gone asks Pindarus to stab him, in exchange for his freedom.

There are many ways to stage a war, what different techniques can be utilised to enhance the action – Sound? Slow motion? Tableaux? Lighting?

As well as representing the physical action of battle, Cassius and his soldiers give a running commentary. How might we ensure the audience are clear about what's going on - who's winning and losing?

How might we stage Cassius death? The phrase to 'fall on one's sword' was used by Plutarch writing about the death of Brutus (unit 29) and has been used as a modern day metaphor to describe the resignation of disgraced politicians. A question for discussion might be – Is a decision to jump before being pushed one of honour or cowardice?

28

TITINIUS returns with MESSALA with news of victory, but is too late and finds CASSIUS dead and Pindarus gone. BRUTUS enters with other officers. Brutus mourns the loss of his friend, but is determined to fight on.

How does the death of his friend affect Brutus behaviour?

There are two pressures on Brutus working in conflict – the duty to mourn his friend (reflecting perhaps on the journey of the friendship through the play) versus his duty towards his soldiers and the original cause (they are still in the midst of battle). How might we enable the audience to see this conflict.

UNIT

SUMMARY & QUESTIONS

Like all these scenes in Act 5, as well as many through the play, the stage is full of character who say very little (or indeed nothing), but are witnesses to these big events – their reactions and responses to the action and the text are just as important, perhaps even more, than the central characters. How does their presence impact upon the tone, attitudes, decisions and behaviour of the central characters?

29

After yet more fighting, BRUTUS' troops are pushed back. Rather than be caught by the enemy, Brutus asks each of his friends - CLITUS, DARDANIUS and VOLUMNIUS to help him kill himself but they refuse. Finally the sounds of retreat are heard and the soldiers run away leaving Brutus alone with servant STRATO. Strato agrees to hold Brutus' sword while he runs on it.

Faced with defeat Brutus has a decision to make. Shakespeare instructs the actor to 'whisper' his deathly request to his friends. The audience aren't told what Brutus has asked them after. In the blocking we must be clear about this strange sequence. Why does he whisper it to Clitus? Do the others see Brutus whispering? What are the reactions from Clitus and Dardanius having been asked to help Brutus to 'fall on his sword'?

One by one Brutus friends refuse – what affect does this have on him? Make him more doubt his decision or more determined?

What is Strato thinking, feeling and most importantly doing throughout this scene? He is silent until the end, when he agrees to help Brutus. Is it significant that the others have left the stage? Why did Brutus ask Strato last?

What are the differences between Cassius' death (unit 28) and Brutus' here? They both arrive at the same decision, but have they reached it by a similar thought process? Having addressed the question of Honour vs Cowardice in relation to Cassius, do we feel the same about Brutus?

30

OCTAVIUS and ANTONY enter with MESSALA and LUCILIUS captive and discover STRATO next to BRUTUS' dead body. Antony pays respect to Brutus acknowledging that his actions were driven by good intent.

The battle has been won, Antony and Octavius enter as victors – but how does the sight of Brutus's body affect them?

Antony pays tribute to Brutus saying of all the conspirators, he was the only one who had honest intentions. The victory is certainly bittersweet, but could it even be described as a 'pyrrhic victory' (where what's lost is almost as great, if not greater, than what's won)?

How genuine are Antony's comments? Does he truly mourn the loss of a great Roman, or is it for show?

The way you present the ending might offer insight into some of the earlier rehearsal room discussions and debates – do the ends justifies the means? Were the conspirators right to murder Caesar given what we now know happens?