

JULIUS CAESAR

CONTENTS

Establishing the world 2

Exploring actors interpretive 4
choices



The exercises that follow are practical group activities based on the 2006 production directed by Sean Holmes. They can be used by you with your group in any large, clear space.



Sean Holmes 2006 production of Julius Caesar was an ensemble production. Most of the time, all of the actors were on stage, watching each other as they experienced the events of the story.

To create atmosphere and build dramatic tension, the actors and musicians created detailed soundscapes. Using a mixture of live amplified sounds, actors and musicians capture sounds which give us a sense of place together with sounds which highlight strong feelings and emotions. With your group, try the following activities.



Act 1 Scene 1 takes place in a street in Rome. A rabble of citizens is partying in the street. Caesar has won a great battle against Pompey, and his people are celebrating his success. One of the citizens says:

“We make holiday to see Caesar, and to rejoice in his triumph.”

- Sit the Students in a circle and discuss this line.
- What are the significant words?
- Explain that you'll work together to capture the atmosphere of this street party. Start by one player making eye contact with someone else and sending each of the key words across to other Students in the circle as a stage whisper: each word to a different player.
- Whoever receives a word must pass it on getting louder as the party mood grows and more people join in.
- What other sounds can the Students imagine? (For example, chanting, clapping, singing, laughing, children shrieking, footsteps running or dancing, drums, horns, fireworks, a fire, cooking and sharing food, drinking...) Students can use their voices, the physical environment they are working in, perhaps simple percussion instruments to make sounds.
- Divide the Students evenly into four or five groups, and make each group responsible for a part of the soundscape: one group might take the sounds of the preparation, cooking and sharing of food, for example.
- Give one of the groups the four words to use in different ways.
- Each group rehearses their sounds until they are happy and confident in them, and briefly performs them for the other groups.
- Now explain that you will conduct the soundscape. Your hands will indicate which group should come in when, and at what volume.
- Start a performance of your soundscape with the whispered words, and gradually add layers of sound and turn up the volume until it sounds like the party is in full swing.

- To end the soundscape, 'turn off' the Students with these two lines from the opening of the play:

*"Hence home, you idle creatures, get you home: Is this a holiday?
You blocks, you stones, you worse than senseless things!"*

- Explain that the citizens are stopped from celebrating by officers of Rome.
- Ask the Students how the citizens feel about Caesar at the beginning of the play, and how they feel about the party being stopped in this way.



In Sean's production, the rabble was apparent and ever present: a sharp reminder that the future of Rome depended on their support. In rehearsals, the actors worked together to make still images of the citizens as their mood shifts and turns with the events of the play.



In Sean Holmes' 2006 production the actors looked at many different ways of staging Act 3 Scene 2. John Light, Brutus in this production, was dressed in white and covered in Caesar's blood. Both Brutus and Anthony spoke directly to the audience as if we are people of Rome. Sean and the actors experimented with the idea of the mob. They tried placing actors in the audience to speak directly from the crowd; they tried having the actors as a mob down-stage, who responded to what Brutus and Anthony say. Eventually they settled on placing the mob upstage of Brutus and Anthony, with Brutus and Anthony speaking their lines to the whole audience. This activity will help you explore this scene with your group.



- Watch the extract of Brutus' speech www.rsc.org.uk/explore. What is the main thrust of his argument? Discuss with the players why he has chosen to appear before the citizens still covered in blood. What is the effect of having the murder weapon in his hand?
- Watch the extract of Anthony's speech. How would the group describe how Anthony feels? What does he say about Brutus and Caesar?
- Divide the players into two halves. One group is given the things which citizens say before and after Brutus speaks. The other group is given the things which citizens say before and after Anthony speaks. In pairs, the players must paraphrase into modern English the things that the citizens say. Afterwards, ask the players how the citizens view Brutus and Anthony. Both men have some sympathy from the citizens.
- Now ask for two volunteers. One will represent Brutus, the other Anthony. They stand at opposite ends of the room. The rest of the players gather in the centre of the room. Ask the players what each man stands for. (Brutus stands for justice against ambition. He has killed Caesar for the good of Rome. Anthony stands for loyalty to Caesar. He believes the conspirators have murdered Caesar without justification.)
- Now, you, as leader, read out the extract of Brutus' speech (on the next page). As you read, the players can move towards either Brutus or Anthony, physically taking a step towards one point of view or the other. They can use the lines they have created by paraphrasing the citizen's words, and say them if they feel one of them to be appropriate. Repeat the exercise with Anthony's speech (also over the page).
- Afterwards, discuss which arguments and phrases the players felt were most persuasive and why. You can use this discussion to introduce the idea of rhetoric. Which rhetorical devices does each character use, and how do their words make the citizens feel?

ACT 3 SCENE 2 - EXTRACTS

Brutus

Be patient till the last.

Romans, countrymen and lovers! Hear me for my cause; and be silent, that you may hear; believe me for mine honour; and have respect for mine honour, that you may believe; censure me in your wisdom; and awake your senses that you may be the better judge. If there be any in this assembly, any dear friend of Caesar's, to him I say that Brutus' love to Caesar was no less than his. If, then, that friend demand why Brutus rose against Caesar, this is my answer, -Not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved Rome more. Had you rather Caesar were living, and die all slaves, than that Caesar were dead, to live all free men? As Caesar loved me, I weep for him; as he was fortunate, I rejoice at it; as he was valiant, I honour him; but, as he was ambitious, I slew him; there is tears for his love; joy for his fortune; honour for his valour ; and death for his ambition. Who is here so base that would be a bondman? If any, speak; for him have I offended. Who is here so rude that would not be a Roman? If any, speak; for him have I offended. Who is here so vile that will not love his country? If any, speak; for him have I offended. I pause for a reply.

Anthony Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears;
I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him.
The evil that men do lives after them;
The good is oft interred with their bones;
So let it be with Caesar. The noble Brutus
Hath told you that Caesar were ambitious;
If it were so, it was grievous fault;
And grievously hath Caesar answered it.
Here, under leave of Brutus and the rest,
For Brutus is an honourable man;
So are they all, all honourable men,
Come I to speak in Caesar's funeral.
He was my friend, faithful and just to me;
But Brutus says he was ambitious;
And Brutus is an honourable man.
He hath brought many captives home to Rome,
Whose ransoms did the general coffers fill:
Did this in Caesar seem ambitious?
When the poor have cried, Caesar hath wept:
Ambition should be made of sterner stuff.
Yet Brutus says he was ambitious;
And Brutus is an honourable man.
You all did see that on the Lupercal
I thrice presented him a kingly crown,
Which he did thrice refuse; was this ambition?
Yet Brutus says he was ambitious;
And, sure, he is an honourable man.
I speak not to disprove what Brutus spoke,
But here I am to speak what I do know.
You all did love him once, - not without cause;
What cause withholds you, then, to mourn for him?
O judgement thou art fled to brutish beasts,
And men have lost their reason!- bear with me;
My heart is in the coffin there with Caesar,
And I must pause till it come back to me.