

## Shakespearean Drama

In Elizabethan times, Shakespeare's plays captivated diverse crowds of theatergoers, ranging from wealthy nobility to common groundlings. But even Shakespeare may have been surprised that his works have so resonated with contemporary audiences, centuries after the plays were first performed. One reason Shakespeare has endured may be that his characters—figures from history and his imagination—transcend any particular time or place. Many of these characters are **archetypes**—familiar character types that appear over and over again in literature. The scheming characters and conspiracies at the heart of *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar* are as relevant today as they were in Shakespeare's time.



Included in this workshop:  
**READING 4** Understand, make inferences, and draw conclusions about the structure and elements of drama and provide evidence from text to support understanding. Analyze how archetypes in drama affect the plot of plays.

**5A** Analyze isolated scenes and their contribution to the success of the plot as a whole.

### Part 1: Characteristics of Shakespearean Tragedy

Perhaps the most powerful of Shakespeare's plays are his tragedies. A **tragedy** is a drama in which a series of actions leads to the downfall of the main character, called the **tragic hero**. The plot builds to a **catastrophe**, or a disastrous final outcome, that usually involves the death of the hero and many others.

To create suspense before this inevitable outcome and to help the audience understand the characters, Shakespeare used certain dramatic conventions—the **soliloquy**, the **aside**, and **dramatic irony**—which are described in the chart.

#### MAIN CHARACTER

##### Tragic Hero

- is of high social rank—a king, a prince, or a general
- has a **tragic flaw**—an error in judgment or a character defect—that ultimately leads to his or her downfall
- suffers complete ruin or death
- faces his or her downfall with courage and dignity



#### DRAMATIC CONVENTIONS

##### Dramatic Irony

- results when the audience knows more than one or more of the characters—for example, Caesar does not know that people are plotting against him, but the audience does
- helps build suspense

##### Soliloquy

- is a speech given by a character alone on stage, used to reveal his or her private thoughts and feelings
- may help the audience understand a character's motivation

##### Aside

- is a character's remark, either to the audience or to another character, that no one else on stage is supposed to hear
- lets the audience in on a character's thoughts or secrets

## MODEL 1: TRAGIC HERO

Many critics believe that the tragic hero in *Julius Caesar* is not Caesar himself but Brutus, a respected Roman. As you read this excerpt, consider what Brutus' words reveal about his character.

from

### Act One

#### Scene 2

Lines 79–89

**Brutus.** What means this shouting? I do fear the people  
80 Choose Caesar for their king.

**Cassius.** Ay, do you fear it?  
Then must I think you would not have it so.

**Brutus.** I would not, Cassius, yet I love him well.  
But wherefore do you hold me here so long?  
What is it that you would impart to me?

85 If it be aught toward the general good,  
Set honor in one eye and death i' the other,  
And I will look on both indifferently;  
For let the gods so speed me as I love  
The name of honor more than I fear death.

**85–87** Brutus declares that he would not care whether he faced death if the matter Cassius has in mind concerns the public welfare (**general good**).

#### Close Read

1. Reread the **boxed** lines. What noble qualities does Brutus display? Cite specific details to support your answer.
2. What possible flaw might Brutus' mindset suggest?

## MODEL 2: SOLILOQUY

Early in the play, Brutus must make a critical choice. Should he continue to live under Caesar's rule, or should he assassinate Caesar before the dictator becomes too power-hungry? Notice what you learn about Brutus from this soliloquy.

from

### Act Two

#### Scene 1

Lines 10–17

10 **Brutus.** It must be by his death; and for my part,  
I know no personal cause to spurn at him,  
But for the general. He would be crowned.  
How that might change his nature, there's the question.

15 It is the bright day that brings forth the adder,  
And that craves wary walking. Crown him that,  
And then I grant we put a sting in him  
That at his will he may do danger with.

**10–12** **It must . . . general:** Caesar would need to be killed, and I have no personal reason to attack him, only concern for the general welfare.

**15 craves:** demands.

#### Close Read

1. In the **boxed** text, Brutus compares Caesar to a poisonous snake (adder). Explain how this analogy helps you understand Brutus' concern about Caesar.
2. What is Brutus' motive for opposing Caesar? Given what you've just learned about Brutus, does his motive surprise you? Explain.

## Part 2: The Language of Shakespeare

Shakespearean language is more grand, more rhythmic, and, admittedly, less comprehensible than everyday modern speech. If you familiarize yourself with Shakespeare's language, though, you will find yourself getting caught up in the intriguing plot that drives *Julius Caesar*.

### BLANK VERSE

Shakespeare's plays are **verse dramas**, in which most of the dialogue is written in the metrical patterns of poetry. Shakespeare wrote primarily in **blank verse**, or unrhymed lines of iambic pentameter. **Iambic pentameter** is a pattern of rhythm that has five unstressed syllables (˘), each followed by a stressed syllable (´). Read these lines aloud, noticing how the rhythm mimics that of everyday speech:

*Such men as he be never at heart's ease  
While they behold a greater than themselves,*

Most of *Julius Caesar* is written in blank verse. In some places, however, Shakespeare broke the pattern to vary the rhythm, create dramatic tension, or distinguish certain characters from others.

### RHETORICAL DEVICES

*Julius Caesar* is about power, ambition, and betrayal. The characters are constantly trying to persuade themselves, each other, and the audience of the rightness of their cause. As a result, the play is full of speeches that make masterful use of rhetorical devices, such as those shown in the chart.

### ELIZABETHAN WORDS TO KNOW

Here are words that you will encounter often while reading *Julius Caesar*:

- an:** if
- ought:** anything
- beseech:** beg
- but:** only
- durst:** dared
- ere:** before
- hie:** hurry
- hither:** here
- mark:** notice
- marry:** a short form of "by the Virgin Mary" and so a mild exclamation
- prithee:** pray thee, or please
- save:** except
- soft:** wait a minute
- thither:** there
- wherefore:** why
- whither:** when
- withal:** also

RHETORICAL DEVICE	EXAMPLE
<b>REPETITION</b> the use of words and phrases more than once to emphasize ideas	Therein, ye gods, you make the weak most strong; Therein, ye gods, you tyrants do defeat. —Act One, Scene 3, Lines 91–92
<b>PARALLELISM</b> the repetition of grammatical structures to express ideas that are related or of equal importance	Not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved Rome more. —Act Three, Scene 2, Line 20
<b>RHETORICAL QUESTIONS</b> the use of questions that require no answer to make the speaker's rightness seem self-evident	Wherein hath Caesar thus deserved your loves? Alas, you know not! —Act Three, Scene 2, Lines 232–233

**MODEL 1: BLANK VERSE**

In the following excerpt, Casca, one conspirator plotting against Caesar, speaks excitedly to the senator Cicero about a violent thunderstorm that is occurring. As you read, notice the rhythmic variation in the lines.

from

*Act One***Scene 3**

**Casca.** Are you not moved when all the sway of earth  
Shakes like a thing unfirm? O Cicero,  
5 I have seen tempests when the scolding winds  
Have rived the knotty oaks, and I have seen  
The ambitious ocean swell and rage and foam  
To be exalted with the threat'ning clouds;  
But never till tonight, never till now,  
10 Did I go through a tempest dropping fire.  
Either there is a civil strife in heaven,  
Or else the world, too saucy with the gods,  
Incenses them to send destruction.

Lines 3–13

**3 sway of earth:** the natural order of things.

**5 tempests:** storms.

**6 rived:** torn.

**8 To be exalted with:** to raise themselves to the level of.

**11–13 Either . . . destruction:** Either there is a civil war in heaven or the world has so insulted the gods that they want to destroy us.

**Close Read**

1. Read the boxed lines aloud and scan the stressed and unstressed syllables. Where are the breaks in the pattern?
2. Point out the key words that are emphasized by the rhythm in lines 3–7. Why might Shakespeare have chosen to stress them?

**MODEL 2: RHETORICAL DEVICES**

This speech is given by Marullus, a Roman official loyal to Caesar's rival, Pompey. As the play opens, Romans take to the streets to celebrate Caesar's victory over Pompey, an occasion that spurs the official's anger. What rhetorical devices does Marullus use in his address to the crowd?

from

*Act One***Scene 1**

**Marullus.** . . . O you hard hearts, you cruel men of Rome!  
Knew you not Pompey? Many a time and oft  
Have you climbed up to walls and battlements,  
To tow'rs and windows, yea, to chimney tops,  
40 Your infants in your arms, and there have sat  
The livelong day, with patient expectation,  
To see great Pompey pass the streets of Rome. . . .  
And do you now put on your best attire?  
And do you now cull out a holiday?  
50 And do you now strew flowers in his way  
That comes in triumph over Pompey's blood?

Lines 36–42 and 48–51

**37 Pompey:** a former Roman ruler defeated by Caesar in 48 B.C. Pompey was murdered a year after his defeat.

**49 cull out:** select.

**Close Read**

1. Consider the use of parallelism in the boxed lines. What words or phrases are parallel?
2. Notice the rhetorical questions that Marullus asks in line 37 and in lines 48–51. Through this rhetorical device, what is he trying to emphasize?

## Part 3: Reading Shakespearean Drama

Understanding Shakespearean drama can be challenging for modern readers. Unusual vocabulary and grammatical structures can be difficult to decipher, and certain dramatic conventions can be tricky to track. Use these strategies to help you appreciate and analyze *Julius Caesar*.

### READING TRAGEDY

- Study the opening **cast of characters**, which in *Julius Caesar* will tell you who is conspiring against the title character and who is supporting him.
- Try to visualize the setting and the action by using information in the **stage directions**, the **dialogue**, and the **synopsis** at the beginning of each scene.
- Keep track of the characters, and think about what their speech and actions reveal about their traits. Caesar, Cassius, Brutus, and Mark Antony are the ones to watch in *Julius Caesar*. At the end, consider how closely each fits the model of a **tragic hero**.
- Note examples of **foreshadowing**, using a chart like the one shown. Think about how each example can help you both **predict** events and better understand the characters' personalities.
- As you read each **scene**, consider it both in isolation and in how it contributes to the plot as a whole.
- Keep in mind the **historical background** on page 1199 as you read the play. *Julius Caesar* is based on ancient Roman figures and events that Shakespeare views from an Elizabethan perspective. Shakespeare knew his audience had divided opinions about Caesar, and he exploits that tension throughout the play.

### READING SHAKESPEARE'S LANGUAGE

- Use the **side notes**, context clues, and the word list on page 1192 to help you understand unfamiliar words and expressions.
- Be aware that the English spoken in Shakespeare's time contains grammatical forms and structures that are no longer used today. Using a chart like the one shown, jot down difficult lines and then reword them to read like modern speech.
- Remember that the end of a line does not necessarily mean the end of a thought. Look closely at each line's punctuation, and try to figure out the meaning of the complete sentence or phrase.
- Paraphrase passages to help you understand characters' public personas as well as their private schemes. When you **paraphrase** a passage, you restate its key points in your own words.

### STRATEGIES IN ACTION

Act One

**Scene 2** Lines 22–24

**Caesar.** What say'st thou to me now?  
Speak once again.

**Soothsayer.** Beware the ides of March.

**Caesar.** He is a dreamer; let us leave him. Pass.

Example of Foreshadowing	My Impressions
Soothsayer (fortune-teller) gives Caesar a mysterious warning about March 15 (ides)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• shows that Caesar is not superstitious or easily rattled</li> <li>• suggests that something terrible may happen to Caesar on that day</li> </ul>

Lines from Play	Modern Rewording
<p>"... you and I will yet ere day See Brutus at his house. Three parts of him Is ours already, and the man entire Upon the next encounter yields him ours."</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Act One, Scene 3, Lines 153–156)</p>	<p>Before the end of the day, you and I will see Brutus at his house. We've already won over three parts of him. The next time we see him, we'll win him over entirely.</p>

**MODEL: READING SHAKESPEAREAN DRAMA**

This scene takes place on the streets as Caesar returns from a public festival. Many characters are on stage at the same time, but Brutus and Cassius speak privately in asides, as do Caesar and Antony. Use the stage directions and sidenotes to help you understand the scene.

from

*Act One***Scene 2**

[Voices and music are heard approaching.]

**Brutus.** The games are done, and Caesar is returning.

**Cassius.** As they pass by, pluck Casca by the sleeve,  
180 And he will (after his sour fashion) tell you  
What hath proceeded worthy note today.

[Reenter Caesar and his train of followers.]

185 **Brutus.** I will do so. But look you, Cassius!  
The angry spot doth glow on Caesar's brow,  
And all the rest look like a chidden train.  
Calpurnia's cheek is pale, and Cicero  
Looks with such ferret and such fiery eyes  
As we have seen him in the Capitol,  
Being crossed in conference by some senators.

**Cassius.** Casca will tell us what the matter is.

[Caesar looks at Cassius and turns to Antony.]

190 **Caesar.** Antonius.

**Antony.** Caesar?

**Caesar.** Let me have men about me that are fat,  
Sleek-headed men, and such as sleep o' nights.  
Yond Cassius has a lean and hungry look;  
195 He thinks too much, such men are dangerous.

**Antony.** Fear him not, Caesar, he's not dangerous.  
He is a noble Roman, and well given.

**Caesar.** Would he were fatter! But I fear him not.  
Yet if my name were liable to fear,  
200 I do not know the man I should avoid  
So soon as that spare Cassius. . . .

Lines 178–201

**181 worthy note:** worthy of notice.

**184 chidden train:** a group of followers who have been scolded.

**185–188** Cicero was a highly respected senator. Brutus says he has the angry look of a **ferret** (a fierce little animal), the look he gets when other senators disagree with him.

**190–214** Brutus and Cassius take Casca aside. The conversation Caesar has with Antony is not heard by any of the other characters around them.

**197** Antony says that Cassius, despite his appearance, is a supporter of Caesar.

**Close Read**

1. Paraphrase what Cassius is saying to Brutus in lines 179–181.
2. Reread the boxed lines and visualize the action unfolding in your mind. Cite details from the stage directions and Brutus' dialogue that helped you form a mental image of the characters' movements.
3. Consider what Caesar says about Cassius in lines 192–195. What do his words reveal about the character traits of Cassius and of Caesar himself?
4. How do you think Caesar will act toward Cassius in the future? Give reasons to support your prediction.



## Part 4: Analyze the Literature

Use what you've learned about Shakespearean drama to analyze this scene from *Julius Caesar*. In the scene, Cassius finally persuades Casca to join the conspiracy against Caesar. When Cinna, another conspirator, enters, they discuss winning over Brutus. Notice how Cassius manipulates the others, and consider what effect the events in this scene will have on the play's plot.

from

### Act One

#### Scene 3

**Cassius.** And why should Caesar be a tyrant then?  
Poor man! I know he would not be a wolf  
105 But that he sees the Romans are but sheep;  
He were no lion, were not Romans hinds.  
Those that with haste will make a mighty fire  
Begin it with weak straws. What trash is Rome,  
What rubbish and what offal, when it serves  
110 For the base matter to illuminate  
So vile a thing as Caesar! But, O grief,  
Where hast thou led me? I, perhaps, speak this  
Before a willing bondman. Then I know  
My answer must be made. But I am armed,  
115 And dangers are to me indifferent.

**Casca.** You speak to Casca, and to such a man  
That is no fleering telltale. Hold, my hand.  
Be factious for redress of all these griefs,  
And I will set this foot of mine as far  
120 As who goes farthest.

**Cassius.** There's a bargain made.  
Now know you, Casca, I have moved already  
Some certain of the noblest-minded Romans  
To undergo with me an enterprise  
Of honorable-dangerous consequence;  
125 And I do know, by this they stay for me  
In Pompey's Porch; for now, this fearful night,  
There is no stir or walking in the streets,  
And the complexion of the element  
In favor's like the work we have in hand,  
130 Most bloody, fiery, and most terrible.

[Enter Cinna.]

**Casca.** Stand close awhile, for here come one in haste.

**Cassius.** 'Tis Cinna. I do know him by his gait.  
He is a friend. Cinna, where haste you so?

Lines 103–164

**103–111** Cassius says the only reason for Caesar's strength is the weakness of the Romans, who are female deer (**hinds**) and trash (**offal**) for allowing such a person as Caesar to come to power.

**111–114** Cassius says that he will have to pay the penalty for his words if Casca is a submissive slave (**willing bondsmen**).

**117 fleering telltale:** sneering tattletale.

**118–120 Be factious . . . farthest:** Form a group, or faction, to correct (**redress**) these wrongs, and I will go as far as any other man.

**125–126 by this . . . Porch:** Right now, they wait (**stay**) for me at the entrance to the theater Pompey built.

**128–130 the complexion . . . terrible:** The sky (**element**) looks like the work we have ahead of us—bloody, full of fire, and terrible.

**132 gait:** manner of walking.

#### Close Read

1. Find examples of rhetorical questions and parallelism that Cassius uses in lines 103–115. What ideas does he want Casca to accept?
2. Reword the exchange between Cassius and Casca in lines 111–120 to sound like modern speech. Use the sidenotes to help you.
3. Read lines 121–124 aloud as you think Cassius would say them. What words are emphasized by the variation in the rhythm of line 124?

**Cinna.** To find out you. Who's that? Metellus Cimber?

135 **Cassius.** No, it is Casca, one incorporate  
To our attempts. Am I not stayed for, Cinna?

**Cinna.** I am glad on't. What a fearful night is this!  
There's two or three of us have seen strange sights.

**Cassius.** Am I not stayed for? Tell me.

**Cinna.** Yes, you are.

140 O Cassius, if you could  
But win the noble Brutus to our party—

**Cassius.** Be you content. Good Cinna, take this paper  
And look you lay it in the praetor's chair,  
Where Brutus may but find it, and throw this

145 In at his window. Set this up with wax  
Upon old Brutus' statue. All this done,  
Repair to Pompey's Porch, where you shall find us.  
Is Decius Brutus and Trebonius there?

**Cinna.** All but Metellus Cimber, and he's gone  
150 To seek you at your house. Well, I will hie  
And so bestow these papers as you bade me.

**Cassius.** That done, repair to Pompey's Theater.  
[Exit Cinna.]

Come, Casca, you and I will yet ere day  
See Brutus at his house. Three parts of him  
155 Is ours already, and the man entire  
Upon the next encounter yields him ours.

**Casca.** O, he sits high in all the people's hearts,  
And that which would appear offense in us,  
His countenance, like richest alchemy,  
160 Will change to virtue and to worthiness.

**Cassius.** Him and his worth and our great need of him  
You have right well conceited. Let us go,  
For it is after midnight, and ere day  
We will awake him and be sure of him.

[Exeunt.]

**135–136 it is . . . stayed for:**

This is Casca, who is now part of our plan (**incorporate / To our attempts**). Are they waiting for me?

**142–146 Cassius tells Cinna to place letters for Brutus at several locations, including the seat of the praetor, a position held by Brutus.**

**150–151 I will . . . bade me:**

I'll hurry (**hie**) to place (**bestow**) these papers as you instructed me.

**154–156 Three parts . . . yields him ours:**

We've already won over three parts of Brutus. The next time we meet him, he will be ours completely.

**157–160 he sits . . .**

**worthiness:** The people love Brutus. What would seem offensive if we did it will, like magic (**alchemy**), become good and worthy because of his involvement.

**162 conceited:** judged.

### Close Read

- Review the boxed details. What might the thunderstorm foreshadow about the conspirators' plans?
- What qualities of Brutus make him so valued by the conspirators?
- How would you describe the character of Cassius, judging by his words and actions in this scene? Support your answer.