Julius Caesar
Study Guide

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Original Practice and Playing Shakespeare

The Shakespeare Tavern on Peachtree Street is an Original Practice Playhouse. Original Practice is the active exploration and implementation of Elizabethan stagecraft and acting techniques.

For the Atlanta Shakespeare Company (ASC) at The New American Shakespeare Tavern this means every ASC production features hand-made period costumes, live, actor-generated sound effects, and live period music performed on period instruments in our Elizabethan playhouse. Our casts are trained to speak directly to the audience instead of ignoring the audience through the modern convention of acting with a "4th wall."

In this workshop we will discover just what Shakespeare's actors and audience might have thought when watching the characters in Julius Caesar thru our own discovery of Original Practice.

Who's Who in Julius Caesar

Flavius and Murellus: Tribunes of Rome. They were supposed to keep the republican traditions of Rome, but these guys don't have much fellow feeling for "the People"

A Carpenter & a Cobbler: Cobblers and Carpenters were known for independence.

Julius Caesar: Roman military commander extraordinaire. As the play starts, he has just defeated Pompey. Caesar is vain, in questionable health, and a tremendous motivator of men.

Calphurnia: Caesar's wife. She is barren, and given to prophetic dreams.

Casca: A Tribune of Rome, and a conspirator against Caesar. He relates several facts of Caesar's offstage behavior at the beginning of the play.

Brutus: Tribune of Rome, chief conspirator. He "was the noblest Roman of them all", an "honorable man".

Marc Antony: Favorite of Caesar. He likes plays and music. He is also an athlete.

Cassius: Chief conspirator. He walks through the storm at the beginning of the play, waiting for lightning to strike him, and prove his extraordinary nature.

Cinna, Decius Brutus, Metellus Cimber, Trebonius, Caius Ligarius: Conspirators against Caesar.

Lucius: Servant and friend of Brutus. **Pindarus:** Cassius' servant

Portia: Brutus' wife. The daughter of Cato, an ally of Pompey, who killed himself, rather than submit to Caesar.

Octavius Caesar: Triumvir after Caesar's death, allied with Marc Antony.

Lepidus: Another Triumvir after Caesar's death

Cinna: A poet. In the wrong place at the wrong time.

Cicero, Publius, Popilius Lena: Senators

Lucillius, Titinius, Messala, young Cato, Strato: Supporters of Brutus and Cassius. Officers in the rebel army.

Clitus: Will not kill Cassius. **Artemidourus:** gives Caesar a warning.

Soldiers, servants, messengers, and a Soothsayer.

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The Story

In ancient Rome, the general Julius Caesar has just defeated the general Pompey in a bloody civil war. The people celebrate Caesar's victory and the Tribunes scold them for their disloyalty to Pompey. The people have placed crowns and other trophies on Caesar's statue. The Tribunes decide to take them off.

Caesar enters, followed by his wife Calphurnia, and several senators, including his friend, Marc Antony. They are on their way to the celebration of Lupercal, a Roman festival. He is stopped in his path by a soothsayer, a person who can tell the future, and told "beware the Ides of March" The Ides of March was the middle of the month, or March 15th, which is just around the corner. They continue on their way to the festivities. Brutus and Cassius remain behind.

Cassius talks to Brutus about how powerful Caesar has become, and implies that he is undeserving. The conversation is punctuated several times by cheers from the nearby celebration. Caesar returns with his entourage, in a state of disorder and unease. He sees Cassius and Brutus, and speaks to Antony about his distrust of Cassius, saying, "Yond Cassius has a lean and hungry look".

They leave, continuing their conversation. Brutus and Cassius detain Casca, a senator who was with Caesar, and ask him why the crowd was shouting. Casca explains that Antony offered Caesar a crown three times, which Caesar refused each time. Casca believes Caesar really wanted it. Because of their concern that Caesar wants to be a King, the three senators plan to meet later.
After Brutus and Casca leave, Cassius reveals his plan to send Brutus anonymous messages, which express the danger. Caesar's increasing power poses to the Republic. That evening there is a terrifying, magnificent storm and Casca is thrilled at the portents of greatness. Cassius and another senator, Cinna, arrive, and the 3 of them plan to meet at Brutus' house to convince him to join their conspiracy.

Later that night (the night before the ides of March) Brutus reads the anonymous notes sent by Cassius and says, " Th'abuse of greatness is when it disjoins remorse from power." Cassius and the others arrive, and Brutus shakes hands with all of them, joining their conspiracy. They discuss the possibility of killing Antony as well as Caesar, but Brutus convinces them that Antony is harmless, and that he should live. They leave, with an agreement to show themselves "true Romans".

Brutus' wife, Portia enters and confronts Brutus about his recent behavior. She asks him to tell her what's troubling him. She believes a husband should confide in his wife and has wounded her own leg, to prove that she can stoically bear pain, as well as keep his secrets. He agrees to tell her later.

The next morning at Caesar's house, Calphurnia demands that Caesar stay at home. She's had nightmares about Caesar's murder so he agrees to stay home, and instructs Decius (a conspirator) to tell the Senate. Decius hints that Caesar would be laughed at if he chooses to stay at home because of his wife's dreams.

Caesar decides to go, calling Calphurnia's fears foolish. When he arrives at the Capitol, several conspirators gather around him, pretending to beg him to change his mind about a decision he's made. As the conspirators crowd around Caesar, he refuses them and insults them. Crying "Speak hands for me!" Casca stabs Caesar, the rest of the senators follow suit. Brutus, the last one, strikes as Caesar says "Et tu, Brute?" ("And you Brutus?") Brutus tells the conspirators to bathe their hands in Caesar's blood, and proclaim Rome's freedom from tyranny.

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Antony mourns the death of Caesar, but does not confront the assassins. He asks to speak at Caesar's funeral. Brutus agrees, over Cassius' objections.

Alone with Caesar's body, Antony praises his friend and curses his murderers. He prophesies death, destruction and horror for Rome, and imagines that Caesar's spirit, seeking revenge, will unleash the "dogs of war". A servant arrives, to tell Antony that Caesar's nephew Octavius has arrived in Rome. Out in the streets, the citizens demand an explanation for Caesar's death. Brutus tells them that Caesar died because of his ambition, and appeals to their sense of patriotism as free Romans. The crowd cheers Brutus. Brutus asks them to stay and listen to Antony.

In his speech, Antony praises Caesar, and calls Brutus and his fellow conspirators honorable men. Then he questions Brutus assessment of Caesar's ambition. He speaks about his love for Caesar, and moves the crowd to pity. He shows the crowd Caesar's bloody, torn cloak, and describes his death. The people demand revenge and begin to riot. As the crowd storms away, Antony says, "Now let it work. Mischief, thou art afoot". We find out that Brutus and Cassius have been forced to flee Rome.

The armies of Brutus and Cassius meet outside of Rome. Cassius and Brutus have a passionate argument, with accusations flying between them, until Cassius offers to kill himself. When they finally reconcile, Brutus tells Cassius that Portia is dead, having killed herself by swallowing fire. They learn that Antony and Octavius, with their armies, are approaching, having put 100 senators to death.

The night before the battle, Caesar's ghost appears to Brutus in his tent.
The next morning, the generals meet and exchange accusations and insults.

Right before the battle begins, Brutus and Cassius talk about what will happen if they lose. They say goodbye, in case they never see each other again. The battle begins.

Cassius, mistakenly believing that all is lost, orders a soldier to stab him. He dies, saying, "Caesar, thou art revenged, even with the sword that killed thee" Titinius and Brutus arrive to tell Cassius of their victory, and discover he is dead.
The battle continues, and Brutus starts to lose. As the enemy approaches, the soldiers flee, urging Brutus to follow. He refuses, and convinces a soldier to hold his sword, while he runs on it, killing himself.
Octavius and Antony arrive and see Brutus' dead body. Antony speaks respectfully of Brutus, while Octavius takes charge and celebrates.

Before a Workshop, Think About This:

Physical Actions Revealed:
Suit the deed to the word, the word to the deed. Where are there examples of the text itself telling the reader what the physical action on stage should be? Example: "Speak hands for me!" Act 3, scene i, or "Away, slight man" Act 4, scene iii.

What is Rhetoric and how do we use it?

Read to yourself Brutus' speech from Act III, scene iii that starts "Romans, countrymen, and lovers!" Then read to yourself Antony's speech that follows it "Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears;" Then find the definitions of Rhetoric, Prose speech and Blank Verse as used in Shakespeare. For great definitions of Rhetoric, go to AmericanRhetoric.com and click on "What Is Rhetoric?"

During a Workshop:

Scene work

Read Act V, scene 3- pay special attention to the part between Cassius, Pindarus and Titinius that starts with " Fly further off, my lord" and ends on line 35 (Arden numbering) and later in that scene, between Titinius and Messala that starts with "Hie you, Messala, and I will seek for Pindarus the while" and ends on line 90. Read this beforehand, and we will discover what the "true playing of it" gives us as students and as actors.

Modern and Shakespearean Political Speeches

Take these phrases of recent political rhetoric and find the figures of speech- what is it for each phrase? Is there more than one?

"All Americans value freedom and faith and family"

"To everything there is a season-a time for sadness, a time for struggle, a time for rebuilding. And now we have reached a time for hope"

Hint: AmericanRhetoric.com has a great data bank of speeches, definitions and sound clips on modern Rhetoric- not just political but all types.

Keep Brutus and Antony's speeches from Act III, scene iii handy- do you see any figures of speech? Write down two from each speech and bring to the workshop- we will learn how to use rhetoric to convince, persuade or deceive our audience.

After a Workshop, Talk About This:

Who really wins? And why does this play resonate for Americans in particular?

So, who really wins in the end? Is it clear? Why? Why is this play titled *Julius Caesar*?

Why do you think our Founding Fathers thought this play was so important? What experience did George Washington have that was similar to one in this play?

Shakespeare and History

Elizabethans often used history to instruct, illuminate human behavior or as a source to create a new story much like us. They were not as concerned with archeological fact or the "real story" when researching. Shakespeare used many different sources for his plays- older plays, current stories, history books or chronicles, written by an earlier author, and literature of the age. His source for *Julius Caesar* was Plutarch's *The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans.* Plutarch (AD 50-120) saw history as biography and loved the mixing of historical documentation with the lusty, dramatic and revealing anecdotes that told his readers about the passionate glory of the elder age. The Elizabethans revered the ancients to such a degree that much of their literature, the study of Rhetoric and histories are very dependent on the earlier retellings of ancient history. Shakespeare used Sir Thomas North's translation of Plutarch's *Lives* to great effect, often lifting whole segments of North's vigorous prose and plopping it into his verse play!

Discuss archaeological fact versus anecdote, and what can be gained from either view of history.

Shakespeare and his own "Internet"

Conduct an online search for The Reading Wheel, from Agostino Ramelli. Discuss!!

What was "imitatio" and what might we call it nowadays?

Words Invented by Shakespeare and Used for the First Time in this Play:

Engagement
Majestic
Misgiving

Find for yourself where they appear in the play! Can you spot them in performance? Do they mean what you thought they meant?

For Further Information/Exploration:

Websites:

Mr. William Shakespeare and The Internet: http://shakespeare.palomar.edu/- this site contains excellent resources and is a great metasite.

www.AmericanRhetoric.com This is a terrific site –look at the quiz section and the sports rhetoric game to get the most out of language in a fun and interesting way.

Books:

Julius Caesar, The Arden Shakespeare

Shakespeare's Reading Robert S. Miola

Asimov's Guide to Shakespeare by Isaac Asimov

Staging In Shakespeare's Theatres by Andrew Gurr and Mariko Ichikawa

Shakespeare A to Z by Charles Boyce

Coined By Shakespeare Jeffrey McQuain, Stanley Malless

Our performance text is:

The Applause First Folio of Shakespeare in Modern Type, Neil Freeman

For more information on the First Folio of Shakespeare go to:

http://web.uvic.ca/shakespeare/Annex/DraftTxt/index.html