

JULIUS CAESAR



ACTOR PACKET
2017



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About the Play



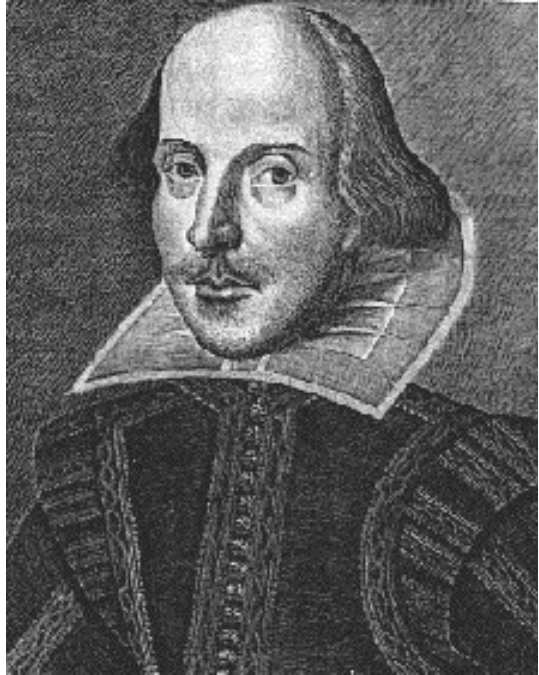
Julius Caesar is one of the most famous tragedies written by William Shakespeare. It only grows more popular with time as most people in the modern world are more familiar with the problems of running a democratic government

than with being at the mercy of a lord. More than *Hamlet* or *Macbeth*, the tragedy of *Julius Caesar* feels immediate to audiences as they can directly relate the world of *Julius Caesar* to their own. *Julius Caesar* tells the story of the assassination of Julius Caesar and the following Liberators' civil war, an actual historical event that marked the end of the ancient Roman Republic and the rise of the Roman Empire.

A noble Roman politician, Brutus, is worried about the growing power of Julius Caesar. Despite being Caesar's personal friend, Brutus believes strongly in the dream of a republic where no one individual holds all the power or forces others into submission. Many other politicians in Rome, such as Brutus' close friend Cassius, fear Caesar's growing power while also perhaps envying it. Brutus is deeply conflicted about whether his loyalty is first and foremost to the country he loves or to the friend who threatens that country. Ultimately, Brutus and the other upset politicians decide to assassinate Julius Caesar together in order to save the Republic from becoming a monarchy or dictatorship. The people love Caesar dearly, however, and his strongest supporters and friends are hardly about to let his death go unavenged.

About the Playwright

It's probably safe to say that nearly everyone in English-speaking countries knows who William Shakespeare is. Due to the huge impact that he's had on English literature, Shakespeare has become an important part of Western culture. Even all these centuries after his lifetime, his works still continue to be widely adapted, performed, and studied, making him a household name worldwide. Shakespeare has also been a large influence on generations of artists, and references to his work can be found sprinkled throughout centuries of poetry, art, plays, and novels. Despite being such a gigantic cultural figure, however, we know very little about William Shakespeare as a person, and not for lack of trying on the part of researchers and academics.



William Shakespeare was born on April 23, 1564, to the middle-class yet ambitious John Shakespeare and his wife Mary Arden. We don't exactly know how much schooling he had, but it is hypothesized that Shakespeare went to King Edward VI Grammar School in Stratford. There he probably learned Latin and Greek and read some of the histories and works of Roman dramatists that would later inspire his own works. When he was 18, he married Anne Hathaway, who was seven years older than he was. Together, they had two daughters as well as a son who died tragically young. What was going on in Shakespeare's life from 1585 to 1592 is unknown, and we can only speculate. By 1599, Shakespeare had joined the Lord Chamberlain's Men, the most popular acting troupe at the time, and, with a group of its members, started the Globe Theatre where the majority of his plays would be shown. He quickly became renowned as a dramatist and poet. When he died, he left more than 30 plays, and the actors and producers of his productions formed the First Folio, a mostly complete collection of all his plays.

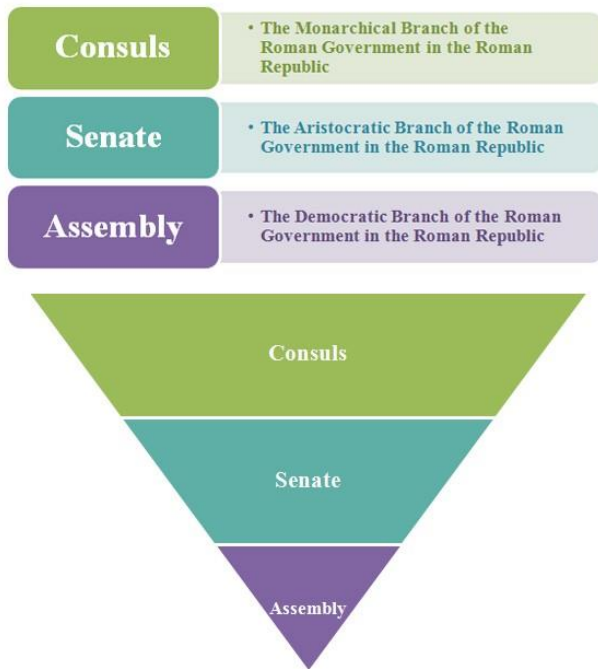
Historical Context

As briefly mentioned in the “About the Play” section, *Julius Caesar* is a dramatization of historical events. Of course, this may seem obvious; Julius Caesar is such a famous figure to Western culture that many recognize the names of Julius Caesar, Brutus, and Mark Antony even if they don’t necessarily know



exactly why these figures were important. Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* is based on the writings of the Roman biographer and essayist Plutarch, translated into English by Sir Thomas North in 1579. Plutarch was born a couple of years after Caesar’s death, so his account of the event is unlikely to be completely factual, but many of the details he recounts about Caesar’s assassination are immortalized by Shakespeare’s play. Details in the play such as which assassin first stabs Caesar, Brutus’ motivation for the murder, and the disturbing signs foreshadowing the assassination—like the bad storm and vivid nightmares—are all described in Plutarch’s account. This is a trend with Shakespeare’s plays; while he was incredibly creative when it came to writing the dialogue of his shows, he often would borrow the entirety of his plots from various sources such as legends, folktales, and histories.

The Politics of Rome

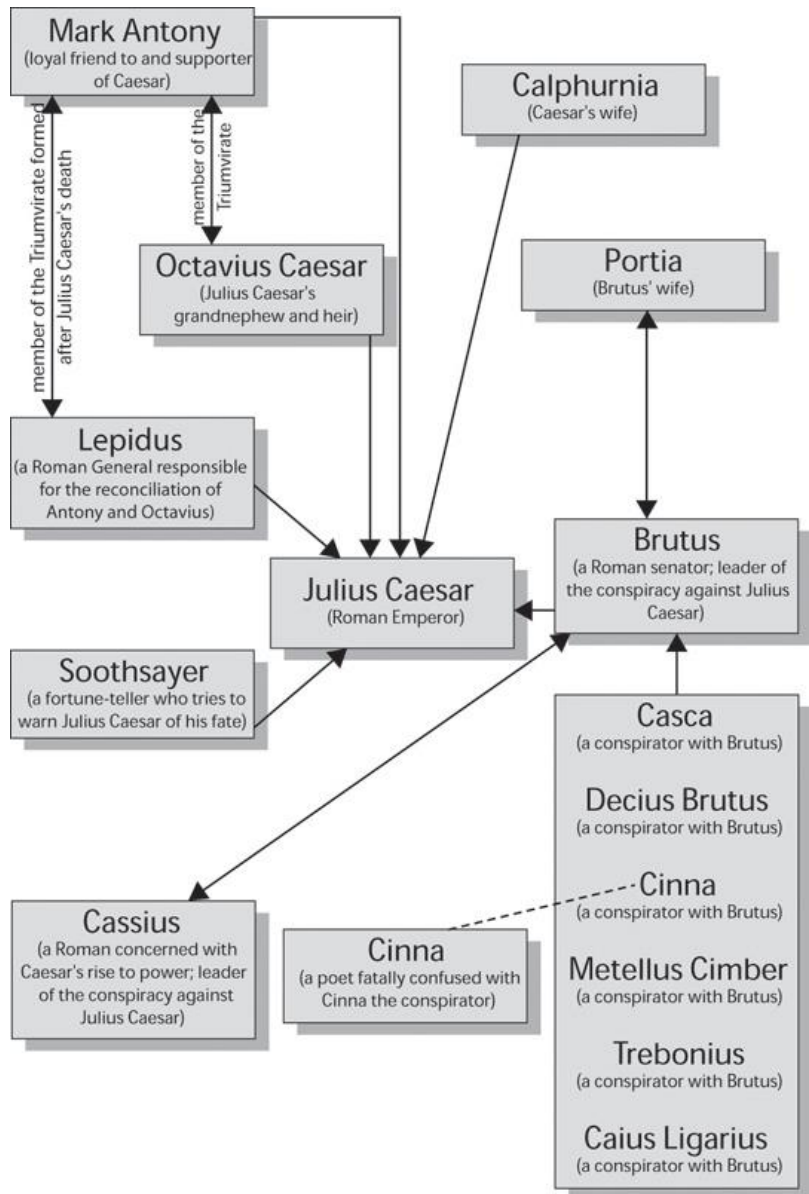


Due to its complexity, the structure of the ancient Roman Republic's system of government can be very confusing to anyone looking to learn about it. Yet it is also simultaneously familiar to Americans since the founding fathers looked to the Roman Republic as an example of democracy, and it inspired many aspects of America's government. The Roman Republic had three branches: executive, judicial, and legislative. The members of the government who generally had the most power were elected officials known as the

magistrates. The consuls, who held the highest magistrate position, were a little like presidents as they possessed the highest elected office and held executive power. The judicial branch was made up of praetors, those in the second most important magistrate position, who functioned both as judges and as army generals. The Senate and the assemblies, made up of all eligible voters, were responsible for presenting and voting on legislation. The Senate and the assemblies, however, were hardly equal, especially late in the Republic's life, since the Senate was made up of privileged aristocrats. Rome was unique as an ancient civilization in that it had citizens who were able to vote and participate in their government. In the Roman Republic, no one man was to stand greater and taller than all the others. This was a cultural point of pride for Romans and is why the conspirators against Julius Caesar so feared his unchecked powers. As the Roman Republic grew into the size of an empire, the system's careful checks and balances began to give way to absolute power to maintain order. By the time the play begins, Julius Caesar has been named dictator for life, giving him the unchecked power of an emperor.

Who's Who

Julius Caesar has a very large cast of characters with over 40 speaking roles! Arkansas Shakespeare Theatre's 2017 production of *Julius Caesar* has cut several characters in an attempt to make the story easier to follow with a strong, consistent ensemble of characters, but it can still be a little difficult to remember who's who. The cast can be easily divided into two parties: the Roman politicians who assassinate Caesar and those who remain loyal to him. Brutus and Cassius are the leaders of the conspiracy against Caesar. Mark Antony, Lepidus, and Octavius Caesar make up a formal political alliance called the Triumvirate to avenge the murder of Julius Caesar and take over his position as leader



of the Roman Republic. These two factions clash not just on the battle field as soldiers but also politically as public figures as they compete for the support of the Roman people. Even supporting roles that aren't directly involved in the main conflict are divided into these factions, like Brutus' wife Portia and Julius Caesar's wife Calphurnia.

Production History



Julius Caesar has a long and varied production history. The earliest recorded performance of *Julius Caesar* was in 1599, meaning that the play has been performed for over four centuries! It was performed in the early days of the American colonies but wouldn't

become as wildly popular as it is now until the nineteenth and following centuries. It was in the twentieth century that Orson Welles would influentially reimagine *Julius Caesar* as being set in the modern day in his production of the show. This is an incredibly popular trend with *Julius Caesar* productions, and even Arkansas Shakespeare Theatre's production, which is also set in the modern day, is indebted to it. As is the case with all Shakespeare plays, there have been several creative productions that set *Julius Caesar* in a whole new setting. For instance, one 2013 production set the play in East Africa in order to provide commentary on how African nation-states struggle with rising dictatorships. Such creative takes on the play demonstrate how the story is universal as well as timeless.

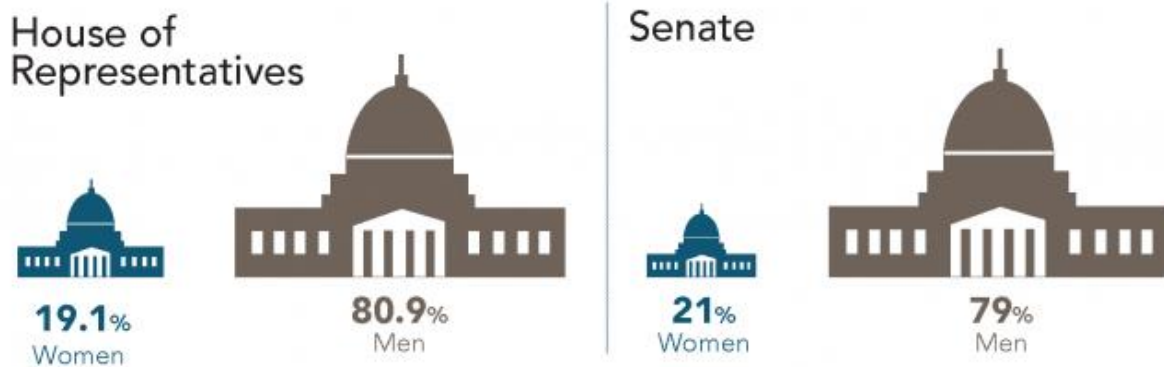


About the Production

Arkansas Shakespeare Theatre's production of *Julius Caesar* is set in modern-day Washington and takes heavy inspiration both from political dramas like *House of Cards* and from current global politics in general. When asked about why *Julius Caesar* speaks to him, the director Robert Ramirez answered that, unlike Shakespeare's other tragedies and histories, *Julius Caesar* "feels relatable to us right now, all over the globe, so its central conflict is immediate to current audiences." This production of *Julius Caesar* is meant to feel as immediate and relevant as possible. The goal of the production is for it to inspire the audience to reflect on current events, our society, and our government. Yet, at the same time, this production of *Julius Caesar* isn't trying to parody or vilify any specific politician. It stands as its own story with its own characters that the audience can hopefully relate somehow to politics today. Julius Caesar himself, for example, is not meant to represent any specific political figure but does represent the threat that very popular, power-hungry politicians pose for democracies and republics. At the same time, when asked about Julius Caesar, Robert said his production is meant to, as Antony says at his funeral, "bury him, not praise him." Caesar isn't some purely evil and conniving figure whom the conspirators heroically slay. Caesar was a strong leader who made great reforms but threatened the ideals of the Republic by becoming a dictator. Likewise, many of the conspirators are not solely concerned about preserving the Republic and instead are hungry for the power and favor that Caesar hoards. Both sides are meant to be portrayed as objectively as possible in order to make the audience reflect on the complexity of running a government.



Gender Matters



Sources

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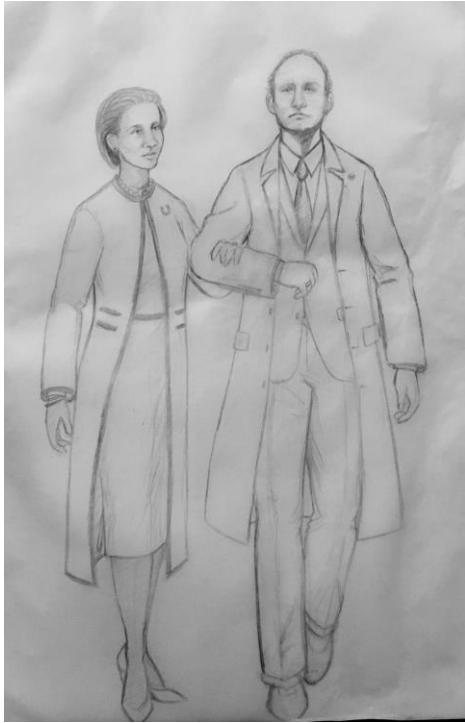


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A pretty significant change that has been made for this production of *Julius Caesar* is that many of the roles that were played by men are now played by women. In the original script there are only two female characters, Portia and Calpurnia, the wives of Brutus and Julius Caesar respectively. This is reflective of the fact that, in the Roman Republic, although women could be citizens, they had very few rights and were unable to vote or hold office. However, since this production of *Julius Caesar* is set in the modern day, it also reflects modern gender roles. Women today can most definitely vote and hold office as an elected official but remain a minority in politics. This is because of the *glass ceiling*, a term that refers to the social barrier that keeps women, and other minorities, from advancing any further than a certain point in their profession. In many ways, politics and government are still very male-dominated fields, perhaps because of how often women with political power are seen as threatening. Director Robert Ramirez chose to make half of the conspirators in the play women in order to “address the workplace issues that arise from the tension between men and women, especially in the current political climate.” This choice to increase the number of female characters in the play makes gender an important theme in the production and aims to make the production feel all the more relatable to modern audiences.

Creating the Look



The costume designer behind AST's production of *Julius Caesar* is Natalie Loveland. She and Robert drew from many popular television shows and films like *House of Cards*, *How to Get Away with Murder*, and even *The Hunger Games* for inspiration for the costumes. However, Natalie also looked to the real-life fashions of many important political figures like Michelle Obama, Hillary Clinton, and Kate Middleton. The costumes are fashionable yet highly professional, reflecting the styles of the politically and professionally elite. In the illustration, referred to as an initial sketch in theater, you can see Natalie's concept for Julius Caesar and his wife Calpurnia. Calpurnia's look is clearly inspired by Michelle Obama, and Julius Caesar's look has been inspired by the conniving and power-hungry protagonist of *House of Cards*.



Setting the Scene

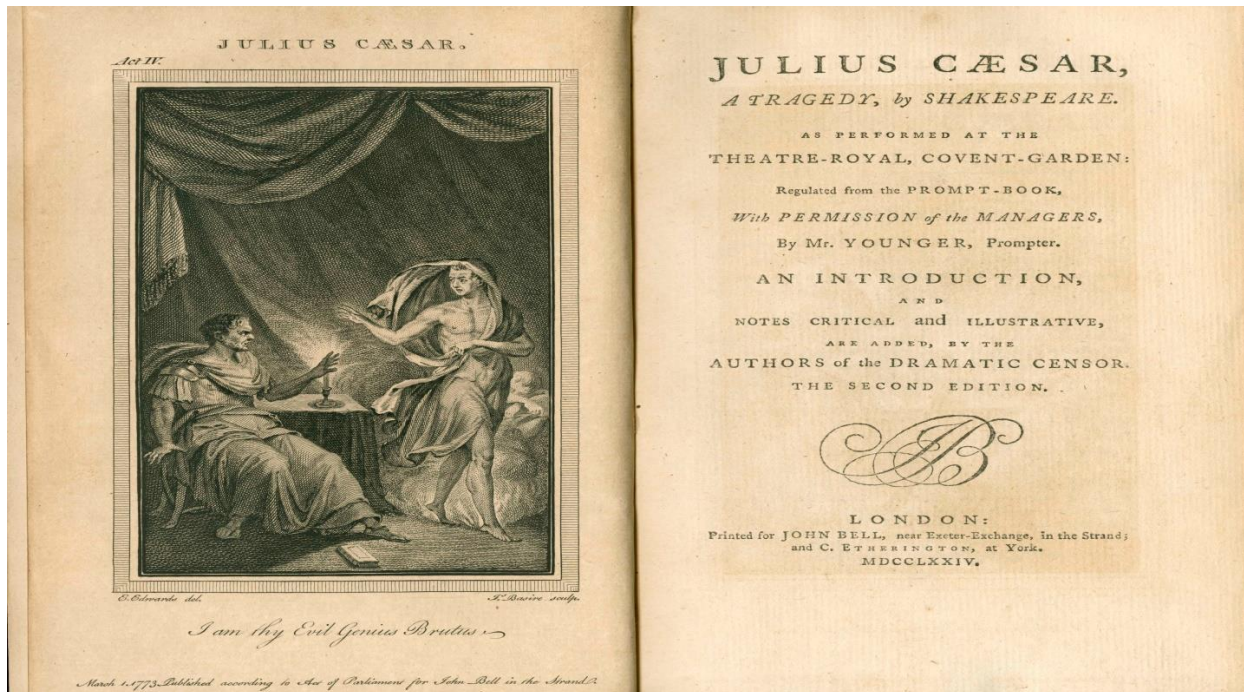
The set designer for AST's production of *Julius Caesar* is Tara Houston. She had the difficult job of coming up with a good set for a show that changes location so many times. The locations fluctuate between two extremes: the polish and sophistication of official government buildings and a battle-torn warzone. Tara Houston says about the set in the first half of the



show that it is “Loosely based on Washington, DC; our Rome is antiseptically clean on the exterior but filled with deceit. The architecture draws inspiration not only from our capital buildings but also from Roman architecture.” For the second half of the show, which depicts Rome in the middle of civil war, Houston says: “I was interested in trying to capture the breakup of order in Rome and reflect that the fighting has moved outside the capital as forces clash on the Plains of Philippi. It also needed to feel dirty and rough. A chunk of the stage is removed and military camo netting and sandbags are installed throughout the space. Bringing in these military motifs allows us to manipulate the playing space and reshape it for the second half of the show. We are also able to completely change the color palette and tone of the space.” Below are her set models for the beginning and end of the show.



Before the Play



Before you see the play, it might be helpful to become familiar with it by reading it out loud with the class or with friends. Shakespeare is often easier to understand when spoken out loud, especially by a trained actor, so even if you don't feel you get everything on the first read, there's no need to worry; the fine cast of actors performing in the show are trained to deliver the lines in the clearest way possible. Nevertheless, going into the show having already familiarized yourself with the play will help you to better follow the show and avoid any serious confusion. Some of the monologues, where only one character speaks at length, can be elusive just like poetry. But, also like poetry, it can be very rewarding to figure out what exactly these monologues mean. When you are reading the play, take note of parts you find particularly challenging and close read them with others to find out what they mean. By the time you go see the play, you can sit back and relax as it all finally comes together. By seeing the play, you'll also be able to directly compare the experience of watching Shakespeare with reading Shakespeare and will hopefully gain an admiration for how compelling Shakespeare continues to be on the stage.

Attending the Play

Believe it or not, there is actually a careful etiquette to attending plays. This is not to dissuade you from enjoying your time at the theater but rather to ensure that everyone has a good time and enjoys the show. Here's a list of tips and rules to keep in mind when you see AST's production of *Julius Caesar*:



1. **TURN OFF CELLPHONES!** This is rule that you are probably already familiar with from going to movie theaters and may seem like an obvious thing to mention. It cannot be stressed enough, though, how important it is to turn off your cellphones as they may disturb not only other people attending the show but also the actors.
2. **No taking pictures!** It is actually illegal to take pictures of the actors without permission while they are on the stage performing.
3. **No snacks!** This is not a movie theater, and munching during the play can be loud and distracting.
4. **Arrive early!** Anywhere from 30 to 15 minutes before the play starts is a good time to arrive and get the best spot.
5. **Dress nicely!** This is more of a tradition than a hard-and-fast rule, but it's a good idea to dress a little more nicely than usual for the theater.
6. **Also bring a sweater, hoodie, or coat!** Most theaters tend to be kept pretty cold.

After the Play



After the play, you will probably have all sorts of conflicting feelings about the characters and their ultimate fates. Tragedies are meant to make us cry and feel deep sympathy for the fallen main characters. In this way, tragedy also compels us to think critically about

the characters' fates and analyze how and why they fell so low. To analyze the themes and characters of *Julius Caesar*, form a Socratic Seminar with your classmates and have an open discussion. Remember, Socratic Seminar is not a debate about proving who is right and who is wrong but, rather, is a tool with which to reach a deeper mutual understanding of the play and its themes. Here are some proposed discussion questions to get you started, but you can always form your own:

1. Every tragedy has a tragic hero. Who is the tragic hero of *Julius Caesar*?
2. The conspirators claim that Caesar was too ambitious. What evidence is there for and against this claim?
3. Which is more important: loyalty to your friend or loyalty to your country? Why?
4. Was Brutus' or Antony's speech more effective? Why?
5. Which is more important: a citizen's freedom or their safety? Is it better to have a stable government led by a dictator, or an unpredictable one where citizens have a say?
6. What is your favorite line? Why does it speak to you?

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