

## English 201 in Italy

[Official course title: English 280-1]  
World Literature I  
Dr. Gavin Richardson

### Text 4:

*Shakespeare, Julius Caesar*

**EDITION:** Any; the printed Folger Shakespeare edition is recommended for its apparatus and explanatory notes to help your reading comprehension; however, a reliable basic e-text can be found here: <http://www.folgerdigitaltexts.org>

[Note: Before starting to read, you should review the attached *Julius Caesar* study sheet.]

### READING JOURNAL:

In a separate document, write 3-5 thoughtful sentences in response to each of these reading journal prompts:

1. Read Cassius's words in 1.2.37-170. How would you sum up Cassius's concerns about Julius Caesar? To what extent are they public concerns? To what extent are they private ones?
2. Review 2.1.83-179. With all these conspirators, why is Brutus even necessary? Why are the conspirators (led by Cassius) so intent on recruiting Brutus to their cause?
3. In 3.2.82 ff., Mark Antony's speech over the dead body of Julius Caesar is justly famous. But I'm not sure people really understand why it's famous. Essentially, Mark Antony seems to have approved of the killing of an ambitious Julius Caesar. But as the speech goes on, he turns the tables on the conspirators. By the time he's finished, the Roman crowd is lamenting Caesar's murder and is ready to pursue his assassins. How exactly does Mark Antony turn the tide of the people's emotions in this speech?
4. Does 4.1. construct the Triumvirs (Antony, Octavian, and Lepidus) as formidable opponents to Brutus and Cassius? As virtuous ones?
5. Read the final scene. Although this tragedy is titled *Julius Caesar*, the title character is dead halfway through the play. In many respects, this is really Brutus's play. The play is often categorized as a tragedy, which can be loosely defined as "the fall of a great man from a lofty height to his destruction." In what way is Brutus a tragic figure? And if we look for a typical "fatal flaw," or *hamartia*, in a tragic hero, what might be Brutus's flaw?

**QUIZ STUDY SHEET:** You will have a 10-question matching quiz based on the information found on the study sheet below.

# The Tragedy of Julius Caesar



## PRE-READING STUDY SHEET DR. RICHARDSON

**CRITICAL DATE: 1599**

**GENRE: TRAGEDY**

**SYNOPSIS:**

In Rome, people are celebrating the triumphant return of Julius Caesar, a noted general. A soothsayer advises Caesar that the fifteenth of March (the “Ides of March”) will be a dangerous day for him. Two Roman nobles, Cassius and Brutus, discuss Caesar’s growing power. Cassius urges Brutus to oppose Caesar for fear that Caesar may become king. Brutus ponders joining the conspiracy against Caesar and ultimately agrees to do so. On the Ides of March, Calphurnia, Caesar’s wife, persuades him to stay home because she fears for his safety. However, after hearing that the senators plan to crown him, Caesar changes his mind and decides to go. In the street, Caesar brushes aside attempts to warn him of the conspiracy. Inside the Senate, the conspirators gather around Caesar and stab him to death, bathing their arms and hands in his blood. Mark Antony learns of the assassination and sends Brutus a message that he will follow Brutus as he followed Caesar. Brutus gives Antony permission to speak at Caesar’s funeral, but Antony double-crosses Brutus and stirs up the people against the



conspirators. What follows is a pitched battle between forces loyal to Caesar (a “Triumvirate” made up of Antony, Octavian, and Lepidus), and those who opposed Caesar, led by Cassius and Brutus. The final scenes purport to tell us who really was “the noblest Roman of them all.”

ALL MATERIALS ADAPTED FROM SIMON &  
SCHUSTER

*Marlon Brando as Mark Antony, in the 1953 film production of Julius Caesar directed by Joseph L. Mankiewicz*

## **CRITICAL CONCEPTS:**

There were three main periods of Roman history (you do not have to know the dates):

- *Monarchy: 753-510 BC*
- *Republic: 510 BC-31 BC*
- *Empire: 31 BC-476 AD*

The Monarchy (ruled by kings) ended when the son of the last king, "Tarquin the Proud," raped Lucretia, the daughter of a Roman nobleman named Brutus. This "old" Brutus is an ancestor of the Brutus of our play. The old Brutus led an uprising which ended kingship in Rome.

The "Republic" of Rome was ruled by senators and consuls, not kings.

Ever since the rape of Lucretia, many Romans have had a distrust of kingship. This play is set in a time when the old Republic is dying away, and the threat of sole rule (the Empire) is beginning to loom again. If all this sounds familiar, the politics of *Star Wars* consciously imitates the politics of ancient Rome.

Our Brutus is a defender of the Roman Republic.

Patrician: An aristocratic, noble, high-born Roman.

Plebian: A common, low-born Roman.

## CHARACTERS:

You are only responsible for identifying the major characters, in white below.

**Julius Caesar** ————— **Calphurnia**

Roman General

a prophetess, wife of Caesar

Senators

to whom Caesar answers

**Cicero**

**Publius**

**Popillious Lena**

Conspirators

against Caesar

**Caius Cassius**

**Marcus Brutus**

— **Portia**

wife of Brutus

**Pindarus**

servant to Casius

**Casca**

**Cinna**

**Flavius**

**Marullus**

**Trebonius**

**Clitus**

**Caius Ligarius**

**Decius Brutus**

**Metellus Cimber**

**Lucilius**

**Messala**

**Poet**

**young Cato**

**Varro**

**Titinius**

**Volumnius**

**Dardanius**

**Claudius**

The Triumvir

in power after Caesar's death

**Octavius**

great nephew and  
adopted son of Caesar

**Mark Antony**

loyal to Caesar

**Lepidus**