Shakespeare in Our Lives

Why do we study the plays of William Shakespeare? He lived and died almost 400 years ago. He wrote about kings and queens and other people far from our own time. His use of poetry is strange to our ears, and his vocabulary is full of words we don't understand and can't pronounce. How could Shakespeare possibly be relevant to our lives today?

To answer these questions, you only need to look at the way Shakespeare's work has woven its way into the fabric of our world. He has shaped the English language in countless ways, coining words and phrases we still use today. His works are quoted in everything from scientific journals to presidential speeches. His plays are produced around the world, more than those of any other playwright who ever lived. There are many theatre companies for whom Shakespeare is their central and defining focus. Every year, more movies are made based on his works; the Internet Movie Database (IMDB.com) lists 150 just since 2000. Writers and other artists have long been inspired by his works. *West Side Story* is *Romeo and Juliet* with street gangs in New York City. *The Lion King* is *Hamlet* in the jungle. *Gnomeo & Juliet* is ... well, you can figure that one out. Operas, ballets, symphonies, paintings, and sculptures are based on his plays. All theatre artists strive to measure their skills against Shakespeare's works, both on stage and on film.

The characters Shakespeare created may live in exotic places and have fancy titles attached to their names, but they are deeply human characters who experience love, grief, joy, jealousy, and pain, and who wrestle with questions of ethics, morality, and justice, just as we do today. Some of the words he used may have faded from our language over the years, but a minimum of effort to understand these terms yields a maximum of benefit, for Shakespeare's understanding of the human condition is extraordinary. To quote Hamlet himself, Shakespeare's plays "hold as 'twere the mirror up to Nature to show Virtue her feature, Scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure."

"How many ages hence
Shall this our lofty scene be acted over,
In states unborn, and accents yet unknown!"
—Act III, Scene 1

INDIANA REPERTORY THEATRE

EXPLORING ...

ONEAMERICA® SEASON 2011-2012

iRT Education
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WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S
JULIUS CAESAR

OCTOBER 18 - NOVEMBER 5

The Story of the Play

From around 508 BC, Rome was a republic, with a government headed by two consuls elected annually by the citizens and advised by a senate. In 60 BC, army general Julius Caesar was elected consul. He joined with Pompey, a fellow general, and Crassus, one of Rome's wealthiest men, to form an unofficial allience, ruling Rome as a triumvirate. At the end of his term, Caesar narrowly avoided prosecution for his actions, and he returned to the army. Over the next ten years he conquered Gaul (modern France) and greatly expanded Roman territory. In 50 BC, Pompey, who had remained in Rome as Consul, ordered Caesar to return. He refused, and civil war began. Two years later, Caesar defeated Pompey, who fled to Egypt, where he was murdered.

Caesar's triumphant return to Rome is where Shakespeare's play begins. A Soothsayer approaches Caesar and warns him to "beware the Ides of March." Caesar brushes off this warning with a shrug. Cassius, a Roman noble who had fought with Pompey but is now reconciled with Caesar, reminds the crowd that in cheering Caesar, they are denouncing Pompey, whom they once considered a hero. Sending the crowd home, Cassius removes ceremonial decorations honoring Caesar's triumph.

Cassius questions Brutus, a civil magistrate who had also fought with Pompey but been forgiven by Caesar, about the prospect of Caesar becoming dictator for life. They hear shouts and wonder what new honors Caesar is receiving from the people. Caesar's party returns, and Caesar voices his mistrust of Cassius. Casca, a colleague of Cassius and Brutus, privately reports to them that Mark Antony, Caesar's second in command, offered Caesar a crown, which Caesar refused—reluctantly. Although he is Caesar's friend, Brutus is clearly disturbed by the idea of an individual man with too much power in the Roman Republic.

Later that night, during a thunderstorm, Cassius urges Casca to join him in a plot against Caesar. Meanwhile, Brutus worries that the only way to stem the tide of Caesar's power is by his death. Cassius, Casca, Decius, and Metellus Cimber arrive to persuade Brutus to join their conspiracy. Brutus insists Caesar's death be achieved in such a way that there will be no doubt it is for the common good of the Republic and the people of Rome. The conspirators depart, now clear in their assassination plan for the following day. Brutus's wife, Portia, sensing his disturbed mind, asks him to confide in her, and Brutus promises to do so.

Caesar's wife, Calpurnia, feeling premonitions of disaster, begs Caesar not to attend the Senate. At first refusing, he finally gives in to her pleas. But at this moment, Decius arrives to accompany Caesar to the Senate. He persuades Caesar that Calpurnia's fears are groundless, just as the other conspirators, with Mark Antony, arrive to accompany Caesar to the capital. Meanwhile, Portia, concerned about her husband, encounters the Soothsayer on his way to see Caesar.

At the Capitol, Caesar again scoffs at the Soothsayer's warnings. Mark Antony departs, and Metellus Cimber draws near Caesar, ostensibly to plead for his brother's life. The other conspirators join Metellus in his pleas, and when they have surrounded Caesar, they stab him to death. After attempting to calm the on-looking senators, the conspirators anoint their knives and hands with Cesar's blood, vowing to free Rome from the tyranny of dictatorship. Mark Antony returns and is overwhelmed by the bloody sight of his dead mentor. Antony asks only that the conspirators explain why Caesar deserved to die and allow him to speak at Caesar's funeral. Against Cassius's wishes, Brutus agrees, and the conspirators exit to the Forum, where Brutus is preparing to address the citizens. Left alone with Caesar's body, Antony vows to avenge his death.

After Brutus's speech, the crowd is willing to forgive his part in the murder of Caesar and follow him. But Antony's eulogy moves them in the opposite direction. While repeatedly claiming to respect Brutus, Antony manages to incite the crowd to riot against the republicans. News arrives that Octavius Caesar, Caesar's grand-nephew, has arrived to discuss the formation of a new government with Octavius and Antony at the helm.

The play moves from the city of Rome to the battlefields of Sardis and Phillipi, where the armies of Brutus and Cassius plan to encounter the opposing armies of the new triumvirate. Dissention has infected the ranks on both sides: Antony and Octavius fall out over the value of Lepidus to their enterprise, while Brutus and Cassius quarrel bitterly over petty accusations. At night Brutus is visited by the ghost of Caesar. Finally the forces meet: Antony and Octavius are confident of victory, while the republicans are haunted with uncertainty. The final moments of the play, littered with deaths honorable and dishonorable, assert the enduring power of Julius Caesar, even in death. Through it all, we see how the most noble intentions may lead to tragic ends.

TO LEARN MORE

Visit this website:

http://absoluteshakespeare.com/

Read this book:

Plutarch's *Lives* (Shakespeare's source)
Modern Critical Interpretations: William Shakespeare's Julius Caesar, ed. Harold Bloom
Augustus Caesar by Nancy Zinsser Walworth
Shakespeare for Everyone: Julius Caesar by Jennifer Mulherin

Watch these DVDs:

Julius Caesar (1953) w/Marlon Brando
Julius Caesar (1970) w/Charleton Heston
Caesar (2002) w/Jeremy Sisto

Shakespeare

Although William Shakespeare is generally considered the greatest dramatist in the English language, few facts are known about his life. Only a handful of legal documents verify his existence. Tradition has it that he was born in Stratford-upon-Avon, a small market town, on April 23, 1564. His father was a glove maker who became High Bailiff of Stratford, a position similar to our mayor.

As the son of a leading citizen and public official, Shakespeare would have gone to school as soon as he learned to read and write. The Stratford grammar school had an excellent reputation. School was in session year round, and students attended for nine hours a day. The curriculum was limited, consisting almost entirely of Latin: grammar, reading, writing, and recitation. By the time Shakespeare was a youth, many traveling theatre companies of significance had visited Stratford, so it is fair to guess that Shakespeare had seen some of them and admired their art.

At age 18, Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway, who was eight years his senior; they had three children, Susanna, Hamnet, and Judith. Little is known of Shakespeare's life at this time. By the early 1590s, however, Shakespeare was a part of the theatrical scene in London, although we know nothing of how he left Stratford and his family to become an actor and playwright in the city. By 1594 Shakespeare was established at the center of theatrical activity, for he is recorded as a shareholder in the Globe Theatre.

Over the next fifteen years, Shakespeare wrote 37 plays, several narrative poems, and more than 150 sonnets. He became the most popular playwright in London's highly competitive theatrical world. He was granted a coat of arms, thus officially making him a gentleman, and he bought sizeable pieces of real estate in and around Stratford with his earnings. His plays exhibit not only a fine sense of poetry and stagecraft, but also an excellent awareness of the tempestuous political and literary atmosphere in which he lived. Shakespeare used his plays metaphorically to suggest how, in a changing society, order could be made out of chaos.

Shakespeare died on April 23, 1616—his 52nd birthday—and was buried in the church chancel in Stratford. A tribute to his genius occurred in 1623, when two of his fellow actors and a London printer published a collected edition of his plays. This kind of publication was rare in its day, as plays were valued for their commercial appeal on the stage, with little thought of them as literature to be preserved. No doubt some of the texts were reconstructed from memory or from a stage manager's promptbook. In any case the *First Folio*, as this collection has come to be called, is a document of great historic and literary importance, for it preserved for posterity some of the greatest writing in the English language, allowing us to study and perform Shakespeare's plays more than 400 years later and for generations to come.

This painting discovered in 2006 by the Cobbe family in Dublin is thought to be the only portrait of William Shakespeare painted during his lifetime.

TO LEARN MORE

Visit these websites:

http://www.folger.edu

http://shakespeare.palomar.edu

Watch these DVDs:

Shakespeare in Love (1998)

Life of Shakespeare (1978) w/ Tim Curry

The Standard Deviants—Shakespeare series (2004)

Check out these books:

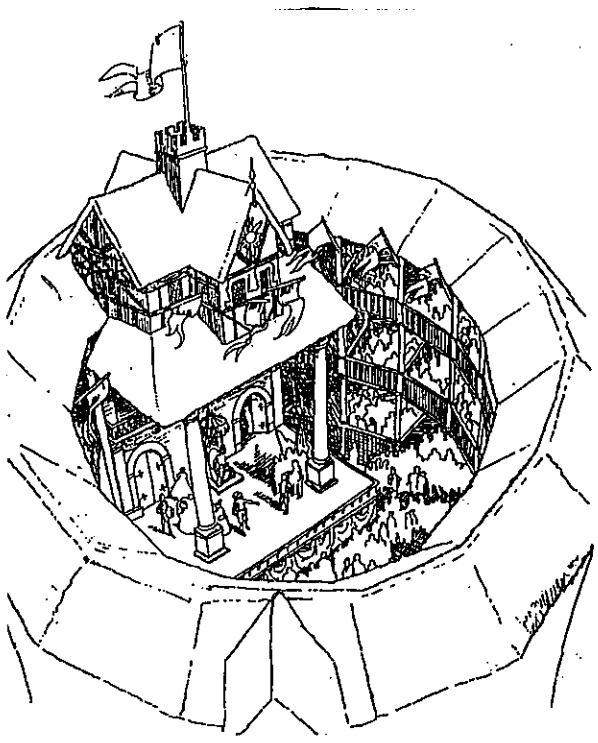
Essential Shakespeare Handbook by Leslie Dunton-Downer and Alan Riding

Shakespeare A to Z by Charles Boyce

Brush Up Your Shakespeare! by Michael Macrone

A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare: 1599 by James Shapiro

Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare by Stephen Greenblatt



& His Theatre

In Shakespeare's day, playgoing was enormously popular for all classes of people, and new theatres were springing up across London. None was more popular than Shakespeare's home theatre. The Globe functioned in many ways as a metaphor for contemporary concepts of society, civilization, and the universe at large. The name of the theatre itself—the Globe—suggested that the events portrayed on its stage were symbolic of events happening in the world. The building's shape, an octagon, suggested the round shape of the world itself.

The Globe was located on the south bank of the River Thames in a disreputable part of London. Built in 1599, the wood-and-plaster building held more than 2,000 spectators, and popular plays often sold out. The public entered through a narrow door located at the base of a small tower. Inside, the building was open to the sky, and performances took place in the afternoon sun.

The audience surrounding the stage was arranged to reflect society at large. Standing on the ground around the stage itself, in the area known as the Pit, were the penny groundlings—those of the lowest classes who paid the least for admittance. Three surrounding levels of balconies rose above them, with correspondingly rising admission prices; Elizabethan society, from top to bottom, was clearly divided and arranged for all to see. Thus an audience member at the Globe could not help but feel his or her place in the world order.

The stage itself jutted out into the center of the yard. On each side of the stage, two tall columns, known as the Pillars of Hercules, were carved and brightly painted. Underneath the roof, the "heavens" were painted sky blue and decorated with starry signs of the Zodiac. Tucked under that ceiling was a small balcony where the theatre's musicians played "the Music of the Spheres." At the rear of the stage, on each side, were doors to the backstage area, known as the tiring house, through which the players made their entrances and exits. Between the doors, a brightly painted curtain hid a small alcove, the "discovery" area; above was an often-used balcony.

There was very little scenery. Most of the company's expense went into costumes. Audiences loved noise and spectacle, so the plays had lots of action and violence. Thunder was created by rolling a cannonball across the wooden floor above the stage. Ghosts and other spirits could be raised from below the stage through trap doors or lowered from the "heavens" by a small crane.

At the center of the Globe was the actor. Men played all the parts, since it was against the law for women to act on the stage; young teenage boys played the female roles. The groundlings crowded close to the stage, and the actor-audience relationship was an intimate one.

Shakespeare wrote for an audience who was largely illiterate; most people obtained their news, religious instruction, and entertainment by ear. Without modern stage and lighting effects, location, time, and atmosphere, as well as emotions and ideas, had to be communicated through dialogue.

Shakespeare's plays were very popular, appealing to a wide spectrum of society. Yet his use of language clearly shows that he expected his audience to understand and appreciate puns, paradoxes, and nuances of meaning, complex metaphors, and innovative vocabulary. It may be a bit more challenging in our highly visual age to tune in our ears, but theatregoers of all ages still thrill to Shakespeare's eloquent exploration of the human condition.

TO LEARN MORE

Visit this website:

http://www.shakespearesglobe.com

Watch this DVD:

Shakespeare's Globe Theatre Restored (2007)

Check out these books:

William Shakespeare & the Globe written & illustrated by Aliki

Eyewitness: Shakespeare by Peter Chrisp

The Usborne World of Shakespeare by Anna Claybourne and Rebecca Treays

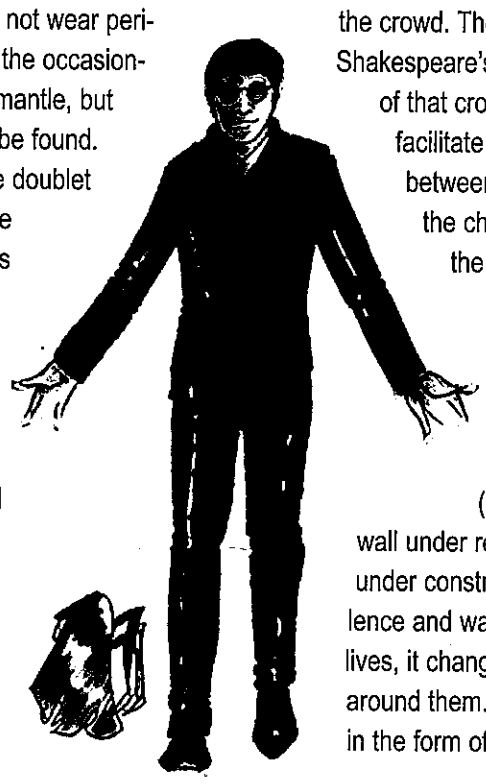
Where Queen Elizabeth Slept & What the Butler Saw by David N. Durant

Julius Caesar at the IRT

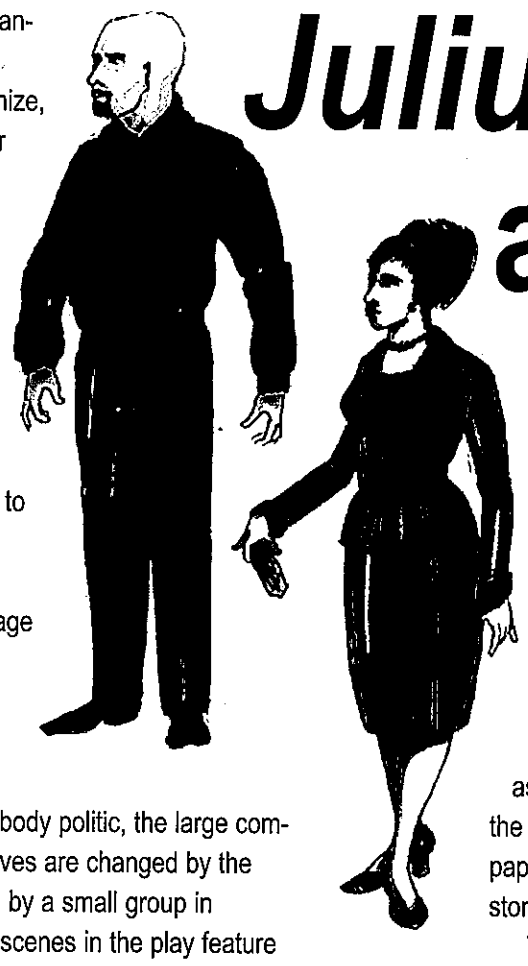
Nine years ago, when the IRT last produced Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, no one knew that our country would still be at war nearly a decade later. Still we should not be surprised that this tragedy about the private cost of public duty, written in 1599, should feel so timely in 2011. For good or ill, the play's themes of principle and politics, war and peace, and the perils of power, are just as resonant today as yesterday.

Julius Caesar is, of course, based on historical events that occurred in the Roman Republic in 44 BC. The real lives of the figures in this drama are fascinating, and they can offer revealing insights into Shakespeare's play. History has much to teach us; we cannot understand our world today without understanding the people and events who brought us here. But Shakespeare was a playwright, not a historian, and in this play, just as in all his history plays, he made choices which were based on telling a good story, not necessarily telling the truth. Shakespeare used history as a starting point; his ultimate goal was not merely to dramatize a series of centuries-old facts, but to say something about the times he lived in, about the nature of humanity.

At Shakespeare's own Globe Theatre, the cast of *Julius Caesar* (or any other play) did not wear period costumes. There may have been the occasional symbolic laurel wreath or Roman mantle, but togas and sandals were nowhere to be found. Shakespeare's actors wore the same doublet and hose as their audience, the same capes and caps and lace cuffs. It was easy for the audience to see themselves on stage, to recognize the contemporary themes in Shakespeare's ancient story.



Likewise, the characters in the IRT's production of *Julius Caesar* will be dressed in contemporary clothes which will easily be recognized by today's audience. As the saying goes, clothes make the man—especially in politics. Different kinds of suits send different messages about power. The color of a necktie is often seen as a symbol of loyalty or allegiance. Jackets off, sleeves rolled up, ties loosened—such choices offer nuances of meaning that we all instantly recognize, tapping into our ideas about public vs. private life and the inner workings of power.



The IRT production's set is designed to provide a close connection between the stage and the audience. Much of *Julius Caesar* focuses on the body politic, the large community whose lives are changed by the decisions made by a small group in power. Several scenes in the play feature characters making public speeches, trying to pursuade the crowd. The IRT audience, as did Shakespeare's Globe audience, will play the role of that crowd. The IRT set is designed to facilitate easy access for actors to move between the stage and the aisles, placing the characters of the play directly among the audience.

The central image of the set is a wall designed to suggest a society in a time of change. The design is inspired by a contemporary photo of a wall in Sienna, Italy (below). Is it an ancient wall under repair, or is it a new wall under construction? Just as violence and war change peoples' lives, it changes the environment around them. Political imagery, in the form of posters, T-shirts, buttons, and even graffiti, will suggest the constant shifting of political tides.

Director Janet Allen says, "The IRT's 2011 production of *Julius Caesar* is conceived to find the intersection between historic Rome and today, in our shared fascination with political intrigue, cult of personality, power struggles, and political violence. The production uses modern dress and contemporary visual images to illustrate that the situation in Rome—and Shakespeare's language and characters—could as easily apply to our time as to 44 BC. The desire for power, the uses of power, the corruption of power in political circles fills our newspapers and websites today, just as it filled the mouths of storytellers and scribes in Caesar's time."

The central question of *Julius Caesar*—what is best for the nation, the state, the community at large?—is as important (and debateable) today as it was 400 years ago, or 2000 years ago. (With the interconnectedness of nations around the world today, perhaps it is even more important.) Many historians have considered the real Julius Caesar to be a "good" dictator: Rome was secure and well protected, social services were excellent, the average citizen was prosperous and happy. But Rome had been a republic for 300 years, and there were those who did not want a dictatorship—just as today, most Americans would object to such a government. Brutus, the central character in the play, is a man of ethics and conscience who convinces himself that an act of violence is the right thing to do, and then is overwhelmed by an aftermath that doesn't turn out as planned. Such a power vacuum after a violent overthrow is an overly familiar topic on today's news programs, websites, and print media.

The goal of the IRT's production of *Julius Caesar* is to make the storytelling as compelling as possible—to tear down the play's "museum" facade and present a story that is vibrant and current. It happened in Rome in 44 BC. It is happening all over the world today.

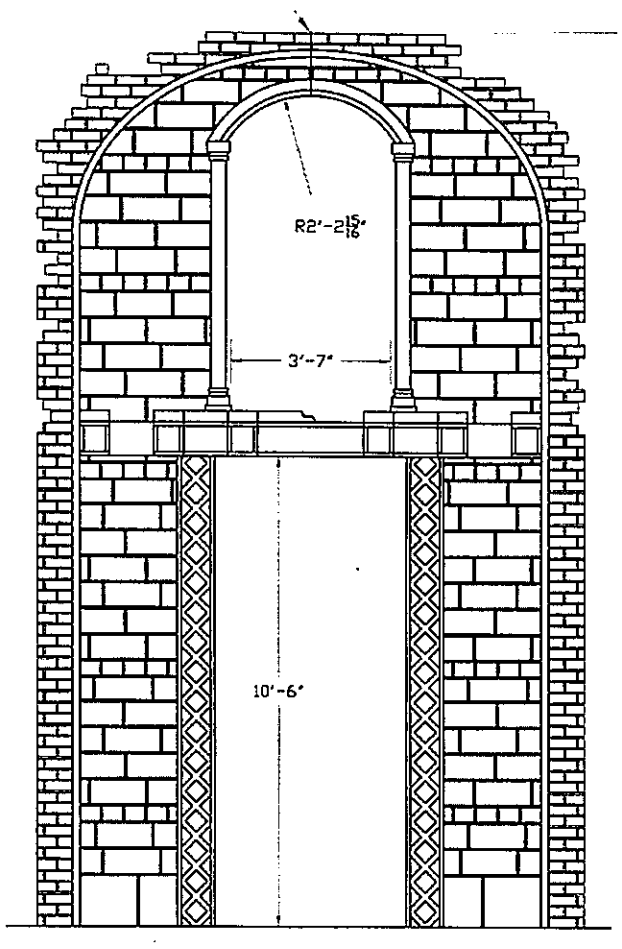
—Richard J Roberts, Dramaturg

Costume renderings by designer Linda Pisano:

(top) Caesar & Calpurnia;

(above left) the Soothsayer;

(right) two views of Casca, one of the conspirators: the world of politics—and assassination—in the first part of the play, and the arena of war in the second part of the play.



(above) Construction elevation by scenic designer Gordon Strain, inspired by this contemporary photo (right) of a wall in Sienna, Italy.

TO LEARN MORE

Visit this website:

http://www.shakespeare-online.com

Watch these DVDs:

Playing Shakespeare w/John Barton (1982)

Spartacus (1960) w/Kirk Douglas

Cleopatra (1963) w/ Elizabeth Taylor

Spartacus (2004) w/Goran Višnjic

Me and Orson Welles (2008) w/Zach Efron

Shakespeare Retold (2007)

Check out these books:

Shakespeare Our Contemporary by Jan Kott

Evoking Shakespeare by Peter Brook

Clues to Acting Shakespeare by Wesley Van Tassel

All the Words on Stage: A Complete Pronunciation Dictionary for the Plays of William Shakespeare by Louis Scheeder & Shane Ann Younts

Shakespeare's Words: A Glossary and Language Companion by David & Ben Crystal

Questions for Discussion

Before seeing the play:

Review the definitions and the use of the following elements of a Shakespeare play:

Language: alliteration, rhyme, meter, couplets
Imagery: metaphor, simile, personification
Comedy and the bawdy
Music

Listen for their use in the production.

How does a play create mood and tone? How might a production enhance those elements?

What is the role of the Soothsayer in the play? Who or what fulfills that function in today's world? How might you imagine this character would be interpreted in a contemporary production of the play?

Discuss what you envisioned in your head while reading the play. Imagine what other historical or contemporary settings might be appropriate. How might the characters be dressed? How do different class members see the play differently? After seeing the IRT production, discuss how it compared with your own vision. How has the IRT's interpretation affected your thoughts about the play? How has your understanding of the play deepened?

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Janet Allen, Artistic Director
Steven Stolen, Managing Director

Study Guide edited by Richard J Roberts & Milicent Wright
Contributors: Laura Pittenger, Molly Wible

After seeing the play:

How would you describe Shakespeare's version of Caesar as a ruler? How does Cassius view him? How does Brutus view him initially? What convinces Brutus to join in the conspiracy? How do the conspirators justify their assassination of Caesar? What kind of ruler might Caesar have been, had he not been betrayed? How does he remain a vital force in the play even after his death?

In his soliloquy in Act II, Scene 1, Brutus struggles to choose between friendship and country. In what situation might you be forced to choose between personal friendships and the common good? How could you weigh such a decision?

Compare the friendships in this play - are they true friendships, or is something else at work? If so, what? How can you tell? What might a true friend have done for Caesar? Similarly, what are your own friendships based on? How do you see your classmates or friends forming friendships with each other? What are the signs of a one-sided friendship? A balanced friendship?

What do the two women in the play contribute to the story? What does this production suggest about women in the world of the play? How does this viewpoint relate to women in the political arena today? What does the play say about the relationship between spouses?

What role do the citizens play in *Julius Caesar*? How do they react as a single character to the events of the play? How are they influenced by Rome's changing leaders? What tools do these leaders use to win over their citizens? How does this process compare to the tools contemporary political figures use with the public?

Julius Caesar has a complex set of characters which put the protagonists and antagonists up for debate. Who is the tragic hero of this play, and why? Who is the antagonist, and why? How are the major characters tragic figures? Which characters did you empathize with? Why? Which character's triumphs and failures seem to be the main focus of this production? What is that character's significance?

What are the virtues and limitations of Brutus? How do these virtues/limitations bring him to his tragic end? Might this play be titled *The Tragedy of Brutus* instead of *Julius Caesar*? Why or why not ?

Where do you see elements of the supernatural in *Julius Caesar*? What do the characters of the play see as supernatural? How do the characters treat these warnings and signs? What are the consequences of ignoring the supernatural in this play? What are some examples today of people "ignoring the signs," not necessarily supernatural?

This production uses only ten actors to create the world of the Roman Republic. How does this production suggest the presence of crowds of spectators? How does it create the illusion that a great battle is occurring?

Serious dramas tend to begin in a state of imbalance and to end with a resolution of the major conflicts. What is the imbalance at the opening of *Julius Caesar*, and how are the major conflicts resolved?

Julius Caesar depicts a world in the process of change. How does the IRT's production suggest that change through staging and design elements?

Activities

The majority of Shakespeare's plays have music of some sort. It was a customary theatrical practice of his time, and it still is in our time. Try your hand at soundtracking this play. What might be your opening music to draw the audience into the world of the play? Which characters might have themes? What scenes might you want to enhance with sound or music? What kind of music would you use? How can music be used to enhance dramatic tension? Perhaps you can create some original compositions.

Create a film story board for *Julius Caesar* or chose one scene and film it. Choose locations and design costumes. You can even add special effects.

Choose one of the principle images in the play: politics, violence, power, or something else of your own choosing. Develop a directorial and/or design concept for the play. Put together a group and stage scenes from the play that illustrate the importance of this image to your vision of the play.

Compare and contrast Brutus's and Antony's funeral orations. Then compare and contrast them with other historical speeches that are political in nature from leaders around the world. What makes a persuasive speech effective?

Collect contemporary and historical images of political uprising. Include not only protests regarding systems of government, but also votes for women, civil rights, the environment, and other issues. Create a collage that illustrates the parallels and contrasts between these events. Alternatively, use video clips to create a montage dealing with this topic. Set your film to protest music from across the years.

Julius Caesar contains a number of scenes involving persuasive public speaking. Select a topic about which you are passionate, and write a persuasive speech. Include as many rhetorical elements as possible to be effective. Present your speech to your class. Afterwards, take a poll of your class to see how persuasive was your argument.

Writing Projects

What is the theatrical meaning of the word tragedy? What does the word mean in our world today? What does it mean to you? In an essay, consider the events of the play in light of the media's frequent use of the word tragedy.

Choose one of the principle images in the play: politics, violence, power, or something else of your own choosing. Write a paper focusing on how that image permeates the play and how it affects the play's meaning.

Write a review of the IRT's production. Consider script editing, design elements, casting, staging, and acting. How effectively did the IRT's production concept convey the play's meaning to you?

Write an alternate ending of the play. What if the conspirators had been caught before their assassination attempt? What if those characters who die at the end of the play had lived? Choose the point at which you want the story to begin changing. What happens to each character as a result of this change?

Write a series of letters between two characters in the play who have a close relationship, saying the things they don't say in the play.