SHAKESPEARE LIVE! 2021 PRESENTS

JULIUS CAESAR

By William Shakespeare

Student-Teacher Study Guide

compiled and arranged by
the Education Department of
The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey
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COVER: A Roman Senator from Act I, scene i in the 2021 touring production of JULIUS CAESAR.
FACING PAGE: The assassination of Caesar in the 2021 touring production of JULIUS CAESAR.
ALL 2017 PHOTOS by Jerry Dalia and Samantha Gordon. ALL 2021 PHOTOS by Avery Brunkus.
What we hear most from educators is that there is a great deal of anxiety when it comes to Shakespeare; seeing it, reading it and especially teaching it. One of the principal goals of The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey's education programs is to demystify Shakespeare, take him "off the shelf" and re-energize his work for students and teachers alike. Toward these goals, this Study Guide provides educators with tools to both allay their own concerns and to expand the theatre-going experience for their students beyond the field trip to The Shakespeare Theatre.

The information included in this guide will help you expand your students' understanding of Shakespeare in performance, as well as help you meet many of the New Jersey Core Curriculum State Standards. We encourage you to impart as much of the information included in this Study Guide to your students as is possible. The following are some suggestions from teachers on how you can utilize elements of the guide given limited classroom time.

- Many teachers have found that distributing or reading the Short Synopsis and Who’s Who pages has greatly increased students’ understanding and enjoyment of the production. It provides the students with a general understanding of what they will be seeing and what they can expect. Some teachers have simply taken the last five minutes of a class period to do this with very positive results.

- When more class time is available prior to your visit, we recommend incorporating the background information on William Shakespeare and the play itself. One teacher divided her class into groups and assigned each group research topics based on the divisions found in the study guide. Using a copy of the corresponding study guide page as a launch pad, the students had one week to research the topics. The students then presented their information to the class in three- to five-minute oral reports. Including the questions that evolved from the presentations, the entire project took only one class period. I am told that the reading of Old English and Middle English texts was “quite entertaining and very informative.”

- Using the questions found in the “TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION,” many teachers will opt to take a class period after the trip to The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey to discuss the play with their students. The questions help keep the comments focused on the production, while incorporating various thematic and social issues that are found in the play.

- One school spent two days working through performance-based activities (a few of which are suggested in the "FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES" section) with a particularly “difficult and rowdy” class. They were astounded with the results. Their students took the opportunity to “ham it up,” and discovered a great joy and understanding from performing Shakespeare.

Again, we hope you will incorporate as many portions of this study guide as you are able into your classroom experience. If you have any suggestions for activities or topics not already found in the Study Guide, please contact our education department. We are always interested in hearing new ways to excite young people (and teachers) about Shakespeare and live theatre.

Happy Teaching,
Brian B. Crowe,
Director of Education
“Just plunge right in
(to Shakespeare). See a play, read it aloud, rent a video, listen to a tape. It’s up to you. When you look at Shakespeare close up, he’s not as intimidating as when he’s seen from afar.”

Norie Epstein
The Friendly Shakespeare

Tragedy can have humor, and
great comedy always has ele-
ments of the tragic.

18th-century critics complained that Shakespeare’s tragedies weren’t consistently serious enough. According to the classic rules, tragedy should be uniformly somber. Shakespeare’s use of humor in his tragedies prevents us from becoming washed away in a dense fog of emotion. Rather, it forces us out of the “tragic” long enough to appreciate the level to which the play’s passions have taken us.

“My advice to anyone seeing Shakespeare:
Don’t worry so much!
Just make sure your ears are clean and your eyes are sharp. Listen and look and watch. Look at the distance people stand from each other; look at the relationships being developed.

Stay with it.
Don’t negate the move that Shakespeare will make toward your gut, toward your soul—because he will touch you there, if you allow yourself to be touched.”

-David Suchet, actor

“Some of the plays have taken on mythic proportions. By myths, I mean we grow up knowing certain things about [Shakespeare’s] characters but we don’t know how we know them.

There are lots of
SHAKESPEAREAN MICROCHIPS lodged in our brains.”

Charles Marowitz, director

“Don’t be afraid to
LISTEN, WATCH
AND REACT;
laugh, cry, and be moved.
Shakespeare wrote for a live and active audi-
ence.
Both audience and actor must be involved to cre-
ate a truly winning per-
formance.

There are some parts of the plays you’ll never under-
stand. But excuse me, I thought that’s what great art was supposed to be about.

DON’T
FREAK
OUT
OVER
IT!”

Peter Sellars,
Director

“It was Olivier’s Henry V
that made me realize that
Shakespeare is about real people
and that his language wasn’t simply beautiful poetry.”

Robert Brustein, director

Shakespeare LIVE! is the Educational Touring Company of The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey
About the Playwright

William Shakespeare, widely recognized as the greatest English dramatist, was born on April 23, 1564. He was the third of eight children born to John Shakespeare and Mary Arden of Stratford-on-Avon in Warwickshire, England. Shakespeare’s father was a prominent local merchant, and Shakespeare’s childhood, though little is known about it for certain, appears to have been quite normal. In fact, it seems that the young Shakespeare was allowed considerable leisure time because his writing contains extensive knowledge of hunting and hawking. In 1582 he married Anne Hathaway, the daughter of a farmer. She was eight years his senior, and the match was considered unconventional.

It is believed that Shakespeare left Stratford-on-Avon and went to London around 1588. By 1592 he was a successful actor and playwright. He wrote approximately 38 plays, two epic poems, and over 150 sonnets. His work was immensely popular, appealing to members of all social spheres including Queen Elizabeth I and King James I. While they were well-liked, Shakespeare’s plays were not considered by his educated contemporaries to be exceptional. By 1608, Shakespeare’s involvement with theatre began to dwindle, and he spent more time at his country home in Stratford. He died in 1616.

Most of Shakespeare’s plays found their first major publication in 1623, seven years after Shakespeare’s death, when two of his fellow actors put the plays together in the First Folio. Other early printings of Shakespeare’s plays were called quartos, a printer’s term referring to the format in which the publication was laid out. These quartos and the First Folio texts are the sources of all modern printings of Shakespeare’s plays.

A MAN OF MANY WORDS

Shakespeare used over 20,000 different words in his plays and poems. Of these, 8.5% (1,700 words) had never been seen in print before Shakespeare used them.

To give you a sense of just how extraordinary this is, consider that the King James Bible uses only 8,000 different words. Homer is credited with using approximately 9,000 different words in his works. Milton is estimated at using 10,000 different words in his works.

THE SONNETS

You might have thought that Shakespeare wrote the sonnets earlier in his career, as a type of “stepping stone” to his plays. However, Shakespeare actually penned most of his sonnets during the various outbreaks of the plague in London, when the theatres were closed.
Shakespeare’s London

London, in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, was a bustling urban center filled with a wide variety of people and cultures. Although most life centered around making a living or going to church, the main source of diversion for Londoners was the theatre. It was a form of entertainment accessible to people of all classes. The rich and the poor, the aristocrats and the beggars all met at the theatre. Though often appeasing the church or the monarchy, theatre at this time did experience a freedom that was unknown in previous generations. Evidence of this can be found in the numerous bawdy and pagan references found in Shakespeare’s plays. This relative artistic license and freedom of expression made theatre extremely unpopular among certain members of society, and it was later banned entirely by the Puritans. Not until the reign of Charles II (1660-1685) was the theatre restored to the status it held in Shakespeare’s day.

The Globe Theatre, the resident playhouse for Shakespeare’s company of actors, was easily accessible to Londoners and an active social center. Actors and performers were also regularly brought to court or to private homes to entertain. Despite their social popularity, actors maintained a relatively low status, sometimes no better than a common beggar or rogue. Most performers were forced to earn a living doing trade work. The aristocracy’s desire for entertainment, however, did spur the development of numerous new theatre pieces. Often a nobleman would become a patron to an artist or company of actors, providing for their financial needs and sheltering them to some degree from official sanctions. In return, the company would adopt the name of the patron. Shakespeare’s acting company was originally named “Lord Chamberlain’s Men” after their patron, Henry Carey, Lord Chamberlain. Later, under the patronage of King James I, they were known as “The King’s Men,” an unprecedented honor at the time.

Despite the flourishing of the arts at this time, London was sometimes a desolate place. Outbreaks of the Black Plague (the bubonic plague) frequently erupted, killing thousands of citizens. Theatres, shops, and the government were all shut down during these times in hopes of preventing the spread of the disease. Elizabethans were unaware that the disease was being spread by the flea and rat populations, which well outnumbered the human population of London at that time.

HEARING A PLAY

*The Elizabethans were an audience of listeners. They would say, “I'm going to hear a play,” not “I'm going to see a play.” The Elizabethan audience would pick up on words and their various meanings that we wouldn’t.*

Marjorie Garber

Speaking in rhyme is not natural to us, but it was to the Elizabethans, so we have to understand what language meant to them, and what language does not mean to us today. If I were an Elizabethan and I wanted to impress you as a lover, I wouldn’t send you flowers. I would come and woo you at your feet and recite to you a sonnet I had written just for you—no matter how bad it was. Elizabethan England was a world where people sang, talked and breathed language.
Shakespeare’s Verse

Shakespeare’s plays are written predominantly in “blank verse,” a poetic form preferred by English dramatists in the 16th and early 17th centuries. It is a very flexible medium, which, like the human speech pattern, is capable of a wide range of tones and inflections. The lines, which are usually unrhymed, are divided into five “feet,” each of which is a two-syllable unit known as an “iamb.” Each iamb is made up of an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable. Blank verse is technically defined as unrhymed iambic pentameter.

Here is a selection of blank verse from *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, with the stressed syllables in bold type:

**Theseus:** To you, your father should be as a god; One that compos’d your beauties, yea, and one To whom you are but as a form in wax By him imprinted, and within his pow’r To leave the figure, or disfigure it.

**Demetrius:** A worthy gentleman.

**Hermia:** In himself he is; But in this kind, wanting your father’s voice, The other must be held the worthier.

In this short selection, you can see a variety of speech tones indicated by the verse. The regularity of the rhythmic pattern and the use of full lines to complete his thoughts give Theseus a sense of calm and authority. Hermia’s brief response, which breaks the iambic pattern, is only a fraction of a line, suggesting that she is impassioned and saying only a portion of what she is thinking. Theseus, however, completes her line and restores the iambic pattern, indicating his authority and the fact that he is, at this point in the play, literally overbearing her will.

Notice that while the blank verse pattern is generally iambic, even in this short passage there are instances where the pattern of stress is broken. The play would quickly become monotonous if the characters truly spoke in nothing but perfect iambic pentameter—fortunately for audiences, Shakespeare’s rhythms often become jagged and jarring to reflect the tension and conflict among his characters. Trying to determine where the rhythm of a line is regular or irregular provides important clues for the actor trying to understand what the character is thinking or feeling. As in real life, choosing to change the stress-bearing syllable may radically alter the meaning of what is being said.

Other clues are provided by word order and punctuation. There were few established rules for either in Shakespeare’s time, so he was free to experiment with unusual syntax. As in our daily speech, the sentence structure (as indicated by both word order and punctuation) helps the reader or listener understand both the literal meaning of the sentence and the emphasis. A comma may indicate a new portion of the same idea, while a dash breaks into the sentence to insert a new idea, and a period suggests the completion of one idea and the start of another. Editors of Shakespeare over the years have quarreled bitterly about what punctuation the Bard “meant” to use or “should” have used. As an actor or reader of Shakespeare, it is up to you to decide if a comma, dash, or period makes the meaning of the line most clear.

THE HEART OF THE POETRY

The alternating unstressed-stressed pattern of blank verse has often been compared to the rhythm of the human heartbeat. When a character in Shakespeare is agitated, confused or upset, the rhythm of their verse often alters, much in the same way a heartbeat alters under similar conditions.

BOY, OH BOY

In Shakespeare’s England, it was against the law for women to perform on the public stage. For this reason, the female roles in plays were always performed by males, usually teenage boys who were of slighter build than the other actors, had higher voices and no facial hair.

Shakespeare jokes about this in *Midsummer*, when Flute tries to be excused from playing Thisbe on the grounds that his beard has begun to come in. The text also leads us to believe that a short boy in the company would have played Hermia, while a taller young man took the role of Helena.
Are You SURE This Is English?

Contrary to popular belief, Shakespeare and his contemporaries did not write in Old English, or even Middle English. **PLAYWRIGHTS OF THE 16TH AND EARLY 17TH CENTURIES WROTE IN MODERN ENGLISH.** Shakespeare spoke (and wrote in) the same language which we speak today. It is possible to be thrown a bit by grammatical "carry-overs" from earlier English ["thee" and "thou" instead of "you"] and the poetic liberties that Shakespeare took, but there is no doubt that the words and syntax used in his plays can be understood today without any "translation." To help clarify this point, here are some examples of Old, Middle and Modern English.

Old English (500 - 1150 CE)  *To listen along, visit this website:* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0zorjzrrvA

When Julius Caesar invaded Britain in BCE 55-4, the Celtic (pronounced KEL-tic) tribes lived in the British Isles. Their languages survive today in the forms of Gaelic (Scotland and Ireland), Welsh (Wales) and Manx (Isle of Man). The Romans brought Latin to Britain. However, early English developed primarily from the language of tribes which invaded and settled England from what is now Germany. This language, known as Old English, was also influenced by the Latin spoken by Catholic missionaries from Rome as well as the Scandinavian dialects of Viking raiders and settlers.

> Often Scyld Scèfi ng sceaðena prèstum, monegum mægðum meodo-setla oft èah, egsode eorl. Syððan ærert wearð féesceaft funden, he þæs Frore gebåd, wéox under wolcnum, weorð-myndum þáh, oð-þæt him aeghwylc ymb-sitt  endra ofer hron-ràde hÿran scolde, gomban gyldan. þæt wæs god cyning!

**selection from Beowulf**
*author unknown, ca 800 CE*

IN MODERN ENGLISH TRANSLATION:

> Often Scyld the Scæfing from squadroned foes, from many a tribe, the mead-bench tore, awing the earls. Since first he lay friendless, a foundling, fate repaid him: for he waxed under welkin, in wealth he throwe, till before him the folk, both far and near, who lived by the whale-path, heard his mandate, gave him gift: a good king he!

Middle English (1150 - 1450 CE)  *To listen along, visit this website:* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QE0MtefOMU

The conquest of England by the Norman army in 1066 brought great changes to English life and the English language. The Old French spoken by the Normans became for many years the language of the Royal Court and of English literature. Over time, the spoken English still used by the lower classes borrowed about 10,000 words from French, as well as certain grammatical structures. By the time English reappeared as a written, literary language in the 14th century, it only distantly resembled Old English. This German-French hybrid language is known as Middle English.

> But nonetheless, while I have time and space Before I continue in this story I think it appropriate to speak of, To tell you, the condition Of each of them, as it seemed to me. And who was who, and of what degree, And in what fashion each was dressed. And with a knight then I will begin.

**selection from The Canterbury Tales**
*by Geoffrey Chaucer, ca 1390 CE*

IN MODERN ENGLISH TRANSLATION:

Modern English (1450 - present day)  *To listen along, visit this website:* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gPlpphT7n9s

With the invention of the printing press in the 15th century, the English language began to develop and mutate at an unprecedented rate. Books, previously a precious and expensive commodity, were now widely available to anyone with basic literacy. Works in Latin, Italian, Spanish, French and Portuguese were being translated by the hundreds, and the translators found it necessary to borrow and invent thousands of new words. English trade and exploration fueled even more cultural and linguistic exchange. The early Modern English of Shakespeare and his contemporaries has been referred to as “English in its adolescence”: daring, experimental, innovative and irreverent.

> Well, you have made a simple choice; you know not how to choose a man: Romeol! No, not he; though his face be better than any man's, yet his leg excels all men's; and for a hand, and a foot, and a body, though they be not to be talked on, yet they are past compare...
Julius Caesar: An Introduction

Unlike many Shakespeare plays, there is substantial evidence about exactly when Julius Caesar was first performed and how it was received. In June of 1599, the Lord Chamberlain’s Men, the theatre company of which Shakespeare was a founding member, completed construction on its new home, the Globe Theatre. A Swiss doctor traveling in London, Thomas Platter, noted in his diary that “on the 21st of September, after dinner, at about two o’clock, I went with my party across the water; in the straw-thatched house we saw the tragedy of the first Emperor Julius Caesar, very pleasingly performed.” The fact that Platter particularly remembers the straw thatching, which would have still been fresh and bright on the newly-built Globe, confirms his attendance at the original Julius Caesar.

Over the next two years, allusions to Shakespeare’s Caesar, and even direct quotations, abounded in the work of other writers. Since the play had not been published (and would not see print until the First Folio of 1623), this is a clear indication of its enormous popularity at the Globe. Roman history and literature was in the standard curriculum for even the most minimal Elizabethan education, and practically every theatre-goer would have known the general circumstances of Caesar’s life and death.

For the next 400 years, as other Shakespeare plays rose and fell in critical and popular opinion, Julius Caesar would remain one of the most-produced and most-studied Shakespeare plays. At one time, more American students were required to read Julius Caesar than any other Shakespeare play. There are several reasons why this is no longer so. In the Sourcebooks Shakespeare edition of the play, Robert Ormsby speculates that “grandiloquent public oratory” was no longer interesting in an age of informal speech and “sound bites,” that teachers of the 1970s believed that other plays, like Romeo and Juliet, were more appealing and relevant to teenagers, and that Julius Caesar’s rootedness in classical history and culture makes it difficult to contemporize for audiences who have no relationship to Roman antiquity.

Although Shakespeare adheres to historical record with unusual scrupulosity in Julius Caesar, the play is anything but a dry and stodgy docu-drama about the idealized world of ancient Rome. For a historical story, the action of the play is intensely personal, emotional, and often shockingly violent. As David Daniell notes in his introduction to the Arden edition, it is both “Shakespeare’s first great tragedy” and an entirely “new kind of political play,” the first political thriller, in a sense.

One of the puzzles that even very young students immediately grasp about Julius Caesar has to do with the title: why is it called Julius Caesar when it’s really about Brutus (or Cassius, or Antony)? Less than halfway into the play, its title character is dead and gone. It is this puzzle that reveals the play’s main concern, which is to not dutifully retell the story of a Roman hero (or a Roman tyrant).

The defining moment of the play is not the assassination itself, but the moments directly after the murder, when the conspirators and Antony battle for the hearts and minds of the Roman public. As a mortal man, Caesar is vulnerable, even pitiable at times; viewed as a symbol and a legend, he shakes the entire world. Julius Caesar is, in fact, a play about the most contemporary of phenomena in the age of the sound bite — it is a play about propaganda, about “spin.” Practically every major character is acutely aware of his or her public persona, and the difference between the public role and the private person. Each attempts, with limited success, to control the way he or she is perceived by the public, and the way his or her friends and enemies are perceived. At the same time, private emotions like love, jealousy, and pride subtly and uncontrollably alter the way each interprets his or her fellows. As Douglas Trevor notes in the Pelican edition, everyone in the play engages in “misreading, misrecognition and miscalculation.” It is a tragedy “about people who make mistakes.”

From the moment of the actual assassination in 44 BC to the present day, opinion has been divided over the “real” Caesar and the “real” Brutus, and their motives. Shakespeare enhances and calls attention to these ambiguities — as Daniell puts it, “Caesar did, and did not, deserve to die... Brutus is, and is not, the tragic hero.” Every time a definitive interpretation is proposed in the play, it is also quickly undercut or shaded with doubt. Early in the play, elderly senator Cicero warns that “men may construe things after their fashion, clean from the purpose of the things themselves.” This may seem like a dry theme on which to build a thriller, but Shakespeare graphically illustrates how dangerous this “construing” can be. Early in the play, Cassius interprets a violent storm as a sign that the heavens sanction his plan to kill Caesar. The character of Casca sees the storm as an omen of an impending doom that he is unable to prevent. It isn’t until Cassius harnesses Casca’s fear that he shakes the entire world.

As a tragedy about the uneasy relationship between our private hearts and our public personas, and the difficulty of determining this relationship in others, Julius Caesar is ultimately a play about politics, ethics, and manipulation of the universal forces of human nature in any era.
Citizens gather to celebrate the triumphant return of Julius Caesar to Rome after his victory over the forces of his former partner turned enemy, Pompey. Passing through the streets, Caesar is stopped by a soothsayer who warns him to beware the Ides of March (March 15). Caesar ignores the soothsayer's warning and passes on. Alone on stage, Cassius and Brutus discuss Caesar's rise to power, and their fear about his potential to become a tyrant. Cassius hints that they must assassinate Caesar. As cheers rise up from the nearby crowd, they surmise that Caesar has been crowned by the populace. As Caesar's entourage passes through, they pull Casca aside, who informs them that Caesar was offered the crown three times, but rejected it all three times. Brutus agrees to continue their discussion later.

Later, during a violent thunderstorm, Cassius encounters Casca and convinces him to take part in a coup against Caesar. He also informs Casca that other noble-minded senators have already been enlisted in this cause. With the addition of the widely-respected Brutus, their faction will be complete.

Having been awake all night agonizing over the course of action he must take, Brutus concludes that Caesar must die in order to prevent his ambition from becoming tyranny. Cassius and the other conspirators arrive at Brutus' home, and plans are laid for the assassination of Caesar, which will take place the next day — on the Ides of March. Despite Cassius' insistence that Antony be killed along with Caesar, Brutus convinces the group to leave Antony untouched. Decius, one of the conspirators well-loved by Caesar, is designated to make sure Caesar is at the Senate the next day, where the assassination is to take place, out of public view. After the conspirators leave, Portia, Brutus' wife, enters. She expresses her great concern for her husband, who has appeared mysteriously and deeply troubled lately. After much pleading, Brutus agrees to tell her about the conspiracy against Caesar.

The next morning, in Caesar's garden, Calpurnia, Caesar's wife, pleads with her husband to stay home, fearing some great harm will come to him based on the nightmares she has had. Though at first he proudly refuses to stay at home, Calpurnia eventually convinces him. Decius Brutus enters and tells Caesar that the Senate plans to crown him. If Caesar does not arrive, the Senate may reconsider his fitness to rule. His pride stung, Caesar decides to go to the Senate despite Calpurnia's fears.

Just outside the Senate, the soothsayer once again warns Caesar to beware the Ides of March. Artemidorus, a commoner who has discovered the plot against Caesar, tries to hand Caesar a message warning, but Caesar declines to read it and Artemidorus is pushed aside by the senators. Under the guise of pleading for the return of a banished colleague, the conspirators gather around Caesar. At the appointed moment, they set on Caesar and stab him to death. Antony arrives and promises not to act against Brutus and Cassius. Again rejecting the advice of Cassius, Brutus then gives Antony permission to speak to the public at Caesar's funeral. In the street outside the Capitol, Brutus addresses the commoners and explains that Caesar was killed to prevent the rise of another tyrant in Rome.

Swayed by his reasons, the crowd cheers Brutus. Antony arrives with Caesar's body and addresses the gathered citizens after Brutus leaves. In a subtle speech, Antony praises Caesar's deeds while at the same time seeming to acknowledge the honor of his assassins. The crowd, moved by Antony's speech, is quickly turned against Brutus and the other conspirators. As the mob rushes through the streets of Rome, it is discovered that Brutus and Cassius have fled the city.

Octavius (Caesar's great-nephew), Antony and Lepidus — who have taken charge of the city as the Second Roman Triumvirate — discuss which senators must be executed in order to restore peace and order to Rome. This done, they plan to lead their troops against Cassius and Brutus. Meanwhile, in Brutus' camp, Brutus and Cassius quarter over wrongs each feels the one has done to the other. Eventually they reach a strained peace and turn their attention to the ensuing battle against the Triumvirate. Brutus insists that they march to Philippi, where Antony's forces are already camped, to take the fight to the enemy before the Triumvirate has reached its full strength. Though disagreeing at first, Cassius concedes. Later that night, Brutus is visited by Caesar's ghost. The ghost states that he will see Brutus once more at Philippi.

On the day of the battle, Octavius insists on taking the stronger flank position in battle despite Antony's seniority. Cassius and Brutus vow that if they do not win the battle, they will take their lives before being taken back to Rome as captives. In the battle that ensues, Brutus leads an attack on Octavius' quickly weakening forces. However, Titinius and Cassius see that Brutus has launched his attack too soon and has left them at a disadvantage. Believing that his own capture is imminent, Cassius kills himself. With Cassius' forces in disarray, Brutus is forced to retreat. Realizing he has been defeated, Brutus orders his servant to assist in his suicide. The servant refuses. Brutus begs a soldier to hold his sword so Brutus can run upon it. Brutus commits suicide as Mark Antony and Octavius are proclaimed the victors of the civil war.

**CRITIC’S CORNER**

Simple or Subtle?

*Julius Caesar* is “a great favorite for school use, because it is so well made, so apparently direct, and so relatively simple. The more often I reread and teach it, or attend a performance, however, the subtler and more ambiguous it seems, not in plot but in character.”

Harold Bloom

*Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*
Sources & History of the Play

Around the time that Shakespeare penned Julius Caesar (1599), there were numerous plays springing up around London also dealing with the famous Roman leader. Shakespeare’s play took as its primary source Sir Thomas North’s translation of Plutarch’s Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans, specifically pulling from the chapters on Julius Caesar, Marcus Brutus and Marc Antony. Other sources that are believed to have influenced Shakespeare’s play include a biography of Caesar found in A Mirror for Magistrates by John Higgins, Nosce Teipsum (“Know Thyself”) by John Davies and the various writings of Cicero. It is believed that Shakespeare lifted the famous “Et tu, Brute” line from another play written about the same time. The phrase is not found in any Latin source, but was a well-known “tag-line” in Shakespeare’s day. Julius Caesar did not appear in print until 1623, when it was included in the First Folio. Of all the plays in the Folio, Caesar is considered the truest to Shakespeare’s original text, and was probably printed from Shakespeare’s original manuscripts. The play was published on six different occasions between 1684 and 1691; an unheard-of popularity for a non-religious text or almanac.

There is some debate as to the date of the first performance of Julius Caesar. The first recorded performance took place on September 21, 1599, as noted in the diary of Thomas Platter. Many historians believe, however, that Julius Caesar was the production which opened the new theatre on Bankside, The Globe Theatre, on June 12, 1599. By all accounts, the play was very popular in Shakespeare’s day, and was twice performed in court — in 1613 and 1638. It was one of the few Shakespeare plays to remain popular continuously into the late 17th century.

The play was most popular in the first half of the 18th century, with over 150 performances in London. After a rather slow latter half of the century, Julius Caesar came back into fashion in 19th century England, and virtually every major English-speaking actor of the time performed at least one of the play’s major roles in his career. Possibly the most notable of these productions took place in 1864 when the Booth family (Edwin, Junius Brutus and John Wilkes) performed Brutus, Cassius and Antony. It was the only time they appeared on stage together.

The play had a very active stage presence in the 20th century, with many productions using it as a theatrical response to the rise of totalitarianism in Germany and Russia. For his famous stage production in 1937-38, subtitled “Death of a Dictator”, Orson Welles greatly altered Shakespeare’s play, and presented Caesar in the guise of Mussolini. The production was a tremendous success, ran for 157 performances and was eventually adapted into a film. A notorious 1968 production of the play in Miami, Florida presented Caesar as Fidel Castro, and audiences cheered at his assassination. The 1993 Barons Court Theatre production in London cast a woman in the role of Julius Caesar, which drew vivid parallels to the Prime Minister at that time, Margaret Thatcher. With its more traditional approach, the 1953 film version, starring Marlon Brando as Marc Antony and Sir John Gielgud as Cassius, is often used by educators when teaching the play. Without a doubt, Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar has a notable place in the history of theatre. It has been used as a “mirror of the interests and styles (not only theatrical) of every period.”

AN AMERICAN PLAY?

“The play was from the beginning of the United States a serious part of North American life for students, politicians, orators and all theatre people: it has been so ever since.”

-David Daniell
The Arden Shakespeare: Julius Caesar

The first American production of Julius Caesar appeared in Philadelphia on June 1, 1770. Flyers for the performance advertised it as “the noblest struggles for liberty by that renowned patriot, Marcus Brutus.”

The Booths, “one of the most distinguished acting families of the nineteenth century,” led lives that “were inextricably entwined with Shakespeare in general and with Julius Caesar in particular,” both on stage and off. Junius Brutus Booth was named after the historical Brutus who liberated Rome from the tyrant Tarquin. On April 14, 1864, his son John Wilkes Booth assassinated Abraham Lincoln, whom he believed to be a tyrant like Caesar. After shooting the president in Ford’s Theatre, Booth jumped onto the stage screaming the Latin phrase, “Sic Semper Tyrannis” (“Thus ever to tyrants”) before fleeing the scene.

Photograph of John Wilkes Booth from www.civilwar.net.
Commentary & Criticism

“Shakespeare had to emphasize politics in *Julius Caesar*, for otherwise Brutus’ fate would be meaningless. Brutus himself never sees his mistake in murdering his best friend and the leader of his country. His fate is dramatically satisfactory only in light of the impact of his action on Roman society as a whole, that is, in its political consequences. His error stems from an unconscious desire for a political world in which evil is impossible. Thus his political blindness has a psychological element, reflecting Shakespeare’s progress towards the psychological portraiture of the great tragedies.”

Charles Boyce
*Shakespeare A to Z*

“It is impossible for even the most judicially minded critic to look without a revulsion of indignant contempt at this travestying of a great man (Julius Caesar) as a silly braggart, whilst the pitiful gang of mischief-makers who destroy him are lauded as statesmen and patriots. There is no single sentence uttered by Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* that is, I will not say worthy of him, but even worthy of an average Tammany boss.”

George Bernard Shaw

“Of this tragedy many particular passages deserve regard, and the contention and reconcilement of Brutus and Cassius is universally celebrated; but I have never been strongly agitated in perusing it, and think it somewhat cold and unaffectioning, comparing with some other of Shakespeare’s plays; his adherence to the real story, and to Roman manners, seems to have impeded the natural vigor of his genius.”

Samuel Johnson

“In *Julius Caesar*, Shakespeare transformed a confused welter of historical fact and legend into taut, balanced, and supremely ambivalent drama.”

Robert S. Miola
*Julius Caesar and the Tyrannicide Debate*

“The world of *Julius Caesar* is one where all those who rule are weak or ill (epilepsy, fever, deafness, shortsightedness, ague, fainting, illnesses real and pretended.)”

David Daniell
*Julius Caesar: The Arden Shakespeare*

“*Julius Caesar’s* stage history in this (the twentieth) century is the tale of an heroic play adrift in an anti-heroic age.”

John Ripley

*Great Caesar’s Ghost*

The Elizabethan idea of a ghost was somewhat different than how we might think of a ghost today. They were not believed to be wispy air-like entities, but as having the appearance and solidity of the living. Ghosts also always came with a mission; to warn the living, to revenge or expose a murder, or to punish someone.

Brutus is confronted by Portia’s ghost in the 2021 touring production of *JULIUS CAESAR*.
The Feast of Lupercal

Caesar’s triumphant return at the beginning of the play occurs in conjunction with the Feast of Lupercal, celebrated on February 15, a time of purification and renewal for the Romans. Traditionally a footrace was run through the streets, which were lined with spectators. It was believed that if a runner touched the stomach of a female onlooker as he ran, the woman would become more fertile and bear more children.

The festivities commemorated the founding of Rome. According to legend, the founders of Rome, Romulus and Remus, were abandoned as infants, and nursed by a wild wolf. The she-wolf and the cave in which she suckled the boys were known as Lupercal.

Who’s Who in *Julius Caesar*:

- **Marcus Brutus** — A devoted Senator and one of Caesar’s most trusted friends; conspires with Cassius and the others to murder Caesar for the good of the Republic
- **Caius Cassius** — Roman Senator who convinces Marcus Brutus and a number of other Senators to murder Caesar on the Senate floor
- **Decius Brutus** — Conspires with Cassius and other Senators to murder Caesar on the Senate; convinces Caesar to come to the Capitol despite Calpurnia’s warnings
- **Casca, Trebonius, Metellus Cimber and Cinna** — Other members of the Roman Senate who conspire with Brutus and Cassius against Julius Caesar
- **Julius Caesar** — A successful and proud Roman General poised to become the first Emperor of the Roman Republic
- **Mark Antony** — Caesar’s most loyal friend and ally. His famous speech at Caesar’s funeral sets the mob of Rome against Brutus and the other Conspirators; forms the second Triumvirate with Octavius and Lepidus
- **Octavius Caesar** — Caesar’s great-nephew and adopted son, he teams with Mark Anthony and Lepidus to form the second Triumvirate which ruled Rome following Caesar’s death; historically, Octavius Caesar would become the First Emperor of Rome

Lepidus — The third (and politically weakest) member of the Triumvirate
Lucius — Brutus’s most loyal servant; he stays by his master’s side right up until the end
Soothsayer — A mysterious Roman fortune-teller who warns Caesar three times to “Beware the Ides of March”
Calpurnia — Caesar’s wife; she warns Caesar not to go to the Capitol after interpreting a dream full of bad omens
Portia — Brutus’s wife; she attempts to convince Brutus to unburden himself the night before the assassination

What’s In A Name?

BRUTUS comes from a Latin word meaning “stupid” (related to the English word “brute”). The name was a given family name, and despite its literal meaning (or rather, BECAUSE of its meaning), it was a much respected name. The name originated with Junius Brutus, who was given his surname because he pretended to be a fool in order to deceive the tyrant Tarquin. His ruse worked, and he was able to overthrow the tyrant and free Rome, giving birth to the Republic.

LUCIUS is the only character in this play completely created by Shakespeare. His name is associated with light, and, in most every scene in which he appears, he is bringing light into the darkened world of Brutus.

“*Peace, count the clock.*”

As the conspirators plan the assassination of Caesar, a clock in town strikes the hour, startling them. Shakespeare seems to have been unaware (or simply unconcerned with the fact) that ancient Rome did not have clocks which chimed the hour. Along with Shakespeare’s other historic inaccuracies, this anachronistic device was much criticized in the 18th and 19th centuries.
Shakespeare’s Common Tongue

... and the “thys” have it

Often Shakespeare will alternate his usage of “thou” for “you”, or “thy” for “your”, or “thine” for “yours”. Though the words are synonymous, there is a great deal of information that can be obtained by looking closely at these choices.

The different uses of these pronouns have to do with status, relationship, degrees of intimacy and shifting attitudes. “You” is used in formal situations and conveys respect from the speaker. “Thou,” used in more informal settings, also can suggest contempt or aggression from the speaker. The use of “thou” places the speaker above the status of the person to whom s/he is speaking. Children are addressed using “thou,” thee” or “thy.” In a conversation between two people of equal status, the use of “you” suggests that everything is going along smoothly, whereas “thou” would suggest that there is some kind of upset or unrest in the relationship.

ACT I
servile – in the manner of a slave or servant
wont – used to, accepted as the norm
“had as lief” – “I would as soon”
“troubled Tiber” – the choppy waters of the Tiber River in Rome
accoutred – equipped or attired
buffet – to fight or hit
Colossus – enormous (like the giant statue called the Colossus)
“I am nothing jealous” – “I am not mistrustful”
fain – gladly
rabbler – the mob; the lowest members of society
unbraced – unbuttoned; in this case, exposed to the elements
bondman – a slave
gait – the manner of one’s walk

ACT II
adder – a poisonous snake
Tarquin – the tyrannical king whom Brutus’ ancestor overthrew
affability – being easy to speak to, friendliness
ingrafted – implanted, grafted together
wafture – gesture, a wave of the hand
physical – medicinal
humours – vapors
augurer – one who interprets omens
“plucking the entrails of an offering forth” – removing the internal organs of a sacrificed animal (to predict the future)
portents – signs or warnings of the future
tinctures – sacred relics stained with the blood of martyrs
coign – device worn by a lord’s servant to indicate his allegiance

ACT III
“spaniel-fawning” – begging like a dog
enfranchisement – to be set free
Olympus – the mountain of the gods in classical mythology
“infants quartered” – small children torn limb from limb
havoc – slaughter and chaos
rid – fled, removed

ACT IV
proscription – outlawed, condemned
“itching palm” – greedy

ACT V
hils – handle of the sword
smatch – slight touch or trace

Shakespeare’s Common Tongue

alack — expression of dismay or shock
anon — soon, right away
auht — nothing
avant — go away
ere — before
hath — has
hence — away (from here)
henceforth — from now on
hither — here
lant — or else
naught — nothing
oft — often
perchance — by chance, perhaps, maybe
sirrah — [pronounced SEER-uh] “hey, you” as to someone of lower status
thee — you
thence — away, over there
thine — yours
thither — there
thou — you
thy — your
wherefore — why [literally: “where is the ‘for’ or ‘reason?’”]
whither — where

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Brutus confronts Cassius in the 2021 touring production of JULIUS CAESAR.

Shakespeare LIVE! is the Educational Touring Company of The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey
What Did He Say?

This is an opportunity to test your comprehension of Shakespeare’s language. Below you will find passages from Julius Caesar. Answer the questions for each passage as specifically as possible.

CASSIUS
Well, honour is the subject of my story.
I cannot tell what you or other men
Think of this life; but, for my single self,
I had as lief not be as live to be
In awe of such a thing as I myself.
I was born as free as Caesar; so were you:
We both have fed as well, and we can both
Endure the winter’s cold as well as he.

1. What does “lief” mean?
2. What is the “thing” he does not want to “live to be in awe of?”
3. What kind of image of Caesar does Cassius paint with this speech?
4. What does Cassius hope to achieve with this speech?

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 crown’d:
How that might change his nature, there’s the question.
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.

1. To whom is Brutus speaking? Who must die?
2. What does he mean by “the general?”
3. Brutus alludes to poisonous snakes, which come out of hiding on sunny days. What is the significance of this? In his metaphor, what is the “bright day?” What is the “adder?”
4. What is the “sting” he is talking about?
5. By the last line, is Brutus certain that the man he intends to kill would otherwise do him harm? Support your answer.

Who Said That?

Match the spoken line to the character who speaks it. One character has two quotes. Three characters have none of the quotes listed below.

A. “Beware the Ides of March.”
B. “For let the gods so speed me as I love The name of honor more than I fear death.”
C. “Why man, he doth bestride the narrow world Like a Colossus.”
D. “To tell thee I will see thee at Philippi.”
E. “Look, I draw a sword against conspirators. If you dare fight today, come to the field. If not, when you have stomachs.”
F. “When I tell him he hates flatterers, He says he does, being then most flattered.”
G. “You have some sick offence within your mind Which by the right and virtue of my place I ought to know of.”
H. “When beggars die, there are no comets seen; The heavens themselves blaze forth the death of princes.”
I. “Et tu, Brute?”
J. “How many ages hence Shall this our lofty scene be acted over In states unborn and accents yet unknown?”
K. “Cry havoc, and let slip the dogs of war.”
Test Your Understanding

1. Shakespeare’s plays are most often written in:
   a) rhyming couplets
   c) blank verse
   b) Old English
   d) prose

2. Shakespeare wrote in what language?
   a) Old English
   c) Middle English
   b) early modern English
   d) Latin

3. The soothsayer warns Caesar to beware:
   a) the Vernal Equinox
   c) the Ides of May
   b) the Ides of March
   d) Brutus and Cassius

4. What image or metaphor does Brutus use to rationalize his decision to kill Caesar?
   a) a tree that must be cut down before it gets too tall
   c) a snake’s egg that must be crushed before it hatches
   b) a fire that must be put out before it spreads
   d) a lion cub that must be killed before it grows up

5. Which of the following men does NOT participate in the conspiracy against Caesar in this play?
   a) Cicero
   c) Casca
   b) Cinna
   d) Decius Brutus

6. Who forms the Second Triumvirate of Rome?
   a) Antony, Brutus, and Cassius
   c) There is no Second Triumvirate
   b) Brutus, Cassius, and Casca
   d) Antony, Octavius, and Lepidus

7. In Shakespeare’s play, what are Caesar’s dying words?
   a) “I will be revenged on you all.”
   c) “Et tu, Brute? Then fall Caesar.”
   b) “Marcus Antonius shall triumph.”
   d) “Et tu, Brute? I shall revenge.”

8. Whose speech turns the citizens of Rome against the conspirators?
   a) Mark Antony
   c) Calpurnia
   b) Brutus
   d) Octavius Caesar

9. Portia reportedly kills herself by:
   a) swallowing fire
   c) drinking poison
   b) stabbing herself
   d) drowning herself in the Tiber

10. Where does the Ghost of Caesar tell Brutus they will meet again?
    a) Carthage
    c) the afterlife
    b) Phillipi
    d) the Capitol

11. Where does the final battle between the conspirators and the Triumvirate take place?
    a) Phillipi
    c) Carthage
    b) Rome
    d) Egypt

12. Which of the following characters is alive at the end of the play?
    a) Brutus
    c) Portia
    b) Cassius
    d) Octavius

13. The ruler(s) of Rome at the end of the play is/are:
    a) Antony and Octavius
    c) Antony, Octavius, and Lepidus
    b) Marc Antony alone
    d) Octavius Caesar alone
Additional Topics for Discussion

About the Play

1. Who is the hero of Julius Caesar? In the end, who “wins” and who “loses”? Why is the play called Julius Caesar and not Marcus Brutus?

2. Compare and contrast Julius Caesar and Marcus Brutus. In the course of the play, Caesar is called a “tyrant,” and Brutus is called “the noblest Roman of them all.” What evidence is there for these judgments? Does the reverse ever seem to be true?

3. In some ways, Julius Caesar seems to be a play about public relations and “spin.” How does the public’s perception of events in the play sometimes outweigh the facts of the events themselves? How do various characters try to manipulate these perceptions?

4. While the historical Caesar is often seen as a powerful ruler, Shakespeare calls attention to a number of his ailments and handicaps. Identify these, and discuss why Shakespeare might have presented Caesar in this manner.

5. Omens, often used in Shakespeare’s plays, appear many times in Julius Caesar. Identify as many examples as you can of events in the play which are (or are perceived to be) omens. What does Shakespeare’s use of these omens suggest? What do the different reactions to the omens tell you about each of the characters? Look in particular at the interpretations of the storm by Casca, Cicero and Cassius. Why does Shakespeare spend so much time on their conflicting interpretations of this event?


About this Production

1. Brutus states that the killing of Caesar should be a solemn and noble sacrifice, not a brutal murder. Describe the assassination of Caesar in this production. Is it ritualistic, or merely savage? Is it both at once? How does the way violence is portrayed in this production affect your perception of the characters and of the world of ancient Rome?

2. What elements of Roman art and architecture are suggested by the scenery for this touring production? What kind of place is “Rome” for this play and this director? Is the scenery evocative of any other times or places?

3. The world of this production is inspired by Ancient Rome, but also includes elements of a contemporary world. Why do you think this choice was made? How might the setting of this play impact your understanding of it? What challenges might arise if a “classic” play is set in a “contemporary” world? Be specific.

Teachers:
Do you have activities or exercises to suggest for this play? We are always looking for new ideas to inspire students (and teachers). Send your suggestions to info@ShakespeareNJ.org, and we will share them with other teachers, or maybe even include them in future study guides.

Follow-up Activities

CRITIC’S CORNER

Write a review of this production of Julius Caesar. Be sure to include specific information and your own reactions to both the acting and the design elements (like set, costumes and sound). Explain what you liked about the production, and what you disliked, and support your opinions. Then submit your review to The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey’s Education Department, or see if it can be published in your school newspaper.

“ALERT THE MEDIA!”
Julius Caesar is a play about people who live in the public eye and are deeply concerned about the public’s opinion. Select a series of events from the play, and “cover” them in the style of a newspaper or television journalist. For example, create a news bulletin on the death of Caesar, an analysis of Antony’s funeral oration, interviews with Cassius and Brutus.

“I LEARN BY THIS LETTER...”
Write a letter from the point of view of one of the characters, discussing an event or situation in the play. For example, a letter from Portia to a friend about the changes in Brutus, or a letter from Calpurnia to a friend about her recurring nightmares.

CASTING CALL
Imagine that you are a movie director about to put together a new film version of Julius Caesar. Choose the eight main characters (in your opinion) and list five words that describe each character. Using these descriptions decide what actor you would cast in each role. Defend your decision by explaining why that particular actor seems right for the character Shakespeare depicts.

THE FIFTEEN-MINUTE CAESAR:
Divide into five groups, and have each group take one act of the play. Your task is to create a three-minute version of your act, using only Shakespeare’s words. Choose carefully the lines from your act that carry the most important information and advance the story. When each group is done, you will have a 15-minute version of Julius Caesar which you can perform for the class. Afterwards, discuss both the process of adaptation and how your “abridgement” compared to the full-length performance.

PUBLIC RELATIONS NIGHTMARE:
Imagine that the conspirators have asked you to create a public relations campaign designed to persuade the citizens of Rome that Republicanism, not dictatorship or monarchy, is the best form of government for Rome. Your campaign may include: a symbol or icon (thinking about existing political symbols in the real world), a propaganda broadcast (audio or video), a song or anthem, an Ides of March monument for the Capitol, or any other persuasive ideas you come up with. Present the elements of your campaign to your fellow students.

REACHING ACROSS THE AISLE
While Shakespeare compresses the time frame of the play, Caesar’s death was followed by almost two full years of warfare between the Republican faction and the followers of the Triumvirate. Imagine that you and a partner are senators who have been fighting on opposing sides, and have survived the final battle at Phillipi. How would you achieve reconciliation? Explain to your former enemy what it was that you were fighting for, and why you feel that your decisions were (or were not) justified.
Shakespeare LIVE! 2021

Who Said That? Answer Key
A. Soothsayer  G. Portia
B. Brutus  H. Calpurnia
C. Cassius  I. Caesar
D. Ghost  J. Cassius
E. Octavius  K. Marc Antony
F. Decius Brutus

Test Your Understanding Answer Key
1. c  2. b  3. b  4. c  5. a
6. d  7. c  8. a  9. a  10. b
11. a  12. d  13. c

Stop, in the Name of Love
It is interesting to note that the word "love" (and variants of the word) appear 56 times in Julius Caesar. This might seem to be a very high number of occurrences in a play focusing on jealousy, murder and political intrigue.

One of the most notable appearances of the L-word is Brutus’ "...we will deliver you the cause,/ Why I, that did love Caesar when I struck him, / Have thus proceeded."

"Blood will have blood, they say..."
One of the innovations of the theatre of Shakespeare’s day was the more realistic (and gory) depiction of stage violence. In the earlier Greek theatre, violence was never shown. The audience was informed of a murder or a great battle by a messenger. No one ever saw the events on stage.

In Shakespeare’s London, however, theatre companies competed to present plays with “shock and splatter.” As with today’s horror movies, a thrillingly graphic death scene could help a play sell many more tickets.

Since the washable synthetic “stage blood” of today had not yet been developed, theatres obtained large quantities of pig’s blood from slaughterhouses for use on stage. One can only imagine the work involved in laundering the costumes for the original production of Julius Caesar between performances.

Sources for this Study Guide:
THE ANNOTATED SHAKESPEARE, Introductions, Notes, and by A.L Rowe
THE ARDEN SHAKESPEARE: JULIUS CAESAR, edited by David Daniell
THE CAMBRIDGE SCHOOL SHAKESPEARE: JULIUS CAESAR, edited by Timothy Seward
THE OXFORD SHAKESPEARE: JULIUS CAESAR, edited by Arthur Humphreys
THE PELICAN SHAKESPEARE: JULIUS CAESAR, edited by William Montgomery, with an introduction by Douglas Trevor
THE SOURCEBOOKS SHAKESPEARE: JULIUS CAESAR, edited by Robert Ormsby
ASIMOV’S GUIDE TO SHAKESPEARE by Isaac Asimov
THE COMPLETE IDIOT’S GUIDE TO SHAKESPEARE, by Laurie Rozakis
FREEING SHAKESPEARE’S VOICE by Kristin Linklater
THE FRIENDLY SHAKESPEARE by Norrie Epstein
THE MIRACLE OF LANGUAGE by Richard Lederer
SHAKESPEARE A TO Z by Charles Boyce
SHAKESPEARE FOR BEGINNERS by Brandon Toropov
SHAKESPEARE FOR DUMMIES by Doyle, Lischner, and Dench
SHAKESPEARE’S IMAGERY by Caroline Spurgeon
SHAKESPEARE IN PERFORMANCE, Consultant Editors Keith Parsons and Pamela Mason
SHAKESPEARE: THE INVENTION OF THE HUMAN by Harold Bloom
SHAKESPEARE OUR CONTEMPORARY by Jan Kott
THEATRE: A WAY OF SEEING, Third Edition by Milly S. Barranger
THE ESSENTIAL SHAKESPEARE HANDBOOK, by Leslie Dunton-Downer and Alan Riding
Meeting the Core Curriculum Content Standards

In 1996, the New Jersey State Board of Education adopted the Core Curriculum Content Standards that set out to clearly define what every New Jersey student should know and be able to do at the end of their schooling. The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey is committed to supporting teachers by ensuring that our educational programs are relevant to the evolving standards of modern education.

Viewing a performance at The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey and participating in the post-performance discussion can serve as a powerful springboard for discussion, writing, and other outlets for higher-order thinking. Supporting teachers by ensuring that our educational programs are relevant to the evolving standards of modern education.

On this page, you will find suggestions for ways to align your study of our production to each standard.

**LANGUAGE ARTS LITERACY STANDARDS**
As a theatre dedicated to the classics, we are continually engaged in exploring some of the world’s greatest literature, and the relationship between the written text and performance. Our philosophy and practice follow the four underlying assumptions of the Language Arts Literacy CCCS: that “language is an active process for constructing meaning,” that “language develops in a social context,” that language ability increases as learners “engage in texts that are rich in ideas and increasingly complex in language,” and that learners achieve mastery not by practicing isolated skills but by “using and exploring language in its many dimensions.” In the practice of theatre, we merge all areas of the language arts, as the standards suggest, “in an integrated act of rehearsal, reflection, and learning.” Below, you will find just a few of the possibilities for aligning your study of our productions to each of these standards.

**VISUAL & PERFORMING ARTS STANDARDS**
Both the CCSS and the Every Student Succeeds Act promotes the inclusion of “programs and activities that use music and the arts as tools to support student success through the promotion of constructive student engagement, problem solving, and conflict resolution” (ESSA 2015). Performances, workshops, and study guide exercises developed by The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey strive to address the Visual and Performing Arts Standards.

Below, you will find a few possibilities for aligning your study of our production to each standard.

**Standard 1.1** The Creative Process: All students will demonstrate an understanding of the elements and principles that govern the creation of works of art in dance, music, theatre, and visual art.

Write a review of the production using domain-appropriate terminology; develop a class rubric for effect theatrical presentations

**Standard 1.2** History of the Arts and Culture: All students will understand the role, development, and influence of the arts throughout history and across cultures.

Discuss the representation of social issues (class, politics, etc.) in the play; research how the historical period affected the writer’s work; compare the play to work from other historical periods.

**Standard 1.3** Performing: All students will synthesize skills, media, methods, and technologies that are appropriate to creating, performing, and/or presenting works of art in dance, music, theatre, and visual art.

Perform a monologue or scene from the play; participate in a classroom workshop that develops the physical and technical skills required to create and present theatre.

**Standard 1.4** Aesthetic Responses & Critique Methodologies: All students will demonstrate and apply an understanding of arts philosophies, judgment, and analysis to works of art in dance, music, theatre, and visual art.

Participate in a post-show discussion of elements such as physicality and creating motivated action; discuss the relationship between play text and production design.
Additional Opportunities for Students and Teachers

THE SHAKESPEARE THEATRE ACADEMY
Each season, the Theatre offers youth and adult classes in a wide range of disciplines connected with classic theatre. Each series of classes meets once a week in one of the Theatre’s beautiful facilities, and gives participants the opportunity to work under the instruction of The Shakespeare Theatre’s renowned artistic and educational staff as well as guest teaching artists.

Spring and Fall Classes Available.

THE STUDENT MATINEE SERIES
Student Matinee performances of the productions in our Main Stage season provide students and teachers with an opportunity to view theatre classics brought to life by some of the nation’s most skilled professional actors in the intimate setting of the F.M. Kirby Shakespeare Theatre. Each includes a comprehensive study guide and a lively talkback with the cast.

SHAKESPEARE LIVE! TOURS AND WORKSHOPS
This acclaimed touring program brings dynamic and visually engaging one-hour productions of Shakespeare’s classics directly into the schools. Each performance includes a comprehensive study guide and a post-performance discussion with the actors. Fun and interactive workshops give students a chance to explore the actor’s approach to bringing Shakespeare’s language to life.

PAGES TO PLAYERS: IN-SCHOOL RESIDENCIES
Residencies provide an opportunity for classroom English teachers in grades 5-8 to partner with the Theatre’s skilled teaching artists to explore Shakespeare’s text in-depth in an exciting, performance-based way that evokes collaboration, self-confidence and creativity while reinforcing language arts skills.

THE JUNIOR AND SENIOR SHAKESPEARE CORPS
Young actors are given the opportunity to participate in the excitement of the Theatre’s summer season through this program, which offers classes, a final presentation, as well as behind-the-scenes and front-of-house experience. Geared for students in grades 6 through 12, admission to this program is through an audition and/or an interview.

For more information on these and other opportunities, please visit www.ShakespeareNJ.org and press the “Education” button.
The acclaimed Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey is one of the leading Shakespeare theatres in the nation. Serving tens of thousands of adults and young people annually, it is New Jersey’s largest professional theatre company dedicated to Shakespeare’s canon and other classic masterworks. With its distinguished productions and education programs, the company strives to illuminate the universal and lasting relevance of the classics for a diverse, contemporary audience. The longest-running Shakespeare theatre on the East Coast, The Shakespeare Theatre will celebrate its fifty-ninth anniversary in 2021.

The Company’s dedication to the classics and commitment to artistic excellence helps set high standards for the field. Nationwide, the Theatre has emerged as one of America’s most exciting companies under the leadership of Artistic Director Bonnie J. Monte, who has been with the company since 1990. It is one of only a handful of Shakespeare Theatres on the East Coast, and in recent years has drawn larger and larger audiences and unprecedented critical acclaim. The opening of the intimate 308-seat F.M. Kirby Shakespeare Theatre in 1998, provided the Theatre with a state-of-the-art venue with excellent sightlines, and increased access for patrons and artists with disabilities.

Prior to the pandemic, the company’s usual season featured six main stage productions presented in the F.M. Kirby Shakespeare Theatre from June through December, as well as an Outdoor Stage production at an open-air Greek amphitheater nestled in a hillside on the campus of Saint Elizabeth University. Throughout the pandemic, we’ve been able to offer both in-person and online programming. Our Pandemic Playhouse Entertainment platform provides patrons with high-quality videos of stage productions and our newly created Backyard Stage, created to be pandemic-safe, is situated behind our unique support facility, The Thomas H. Kean Theatre Factory, which houses all of our administrative and technical shops, as well as a rehearsal hall, classroom spaces, and extensive costume, property and scenic inventory.

In addition to being a celebrated producer of classic plays and operating Shakespeare LIVE! (one of the largest educational Shakespeare touring programs in the Mid-Atlantic region), The Shakespeare Theatre is also deeply committed to nurturing new talent for the American stage. By providing an outstanding training ground for students of the theatre, and cultivating audiences for the future by providing extensive outreach opportunities for students across New Jersey and beyond, The Shakespeare Theatre is a leader in arts education and professional training.

For additional information, visit our web site at www.ShakespeareNJ.org.

The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey is a member of ArtPride, The Shakespeare Theatre Association, Madison Cultural & Arts Alliance, Morris Arts, and is a founding member of the New Jersey Theatre Alliance.

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