

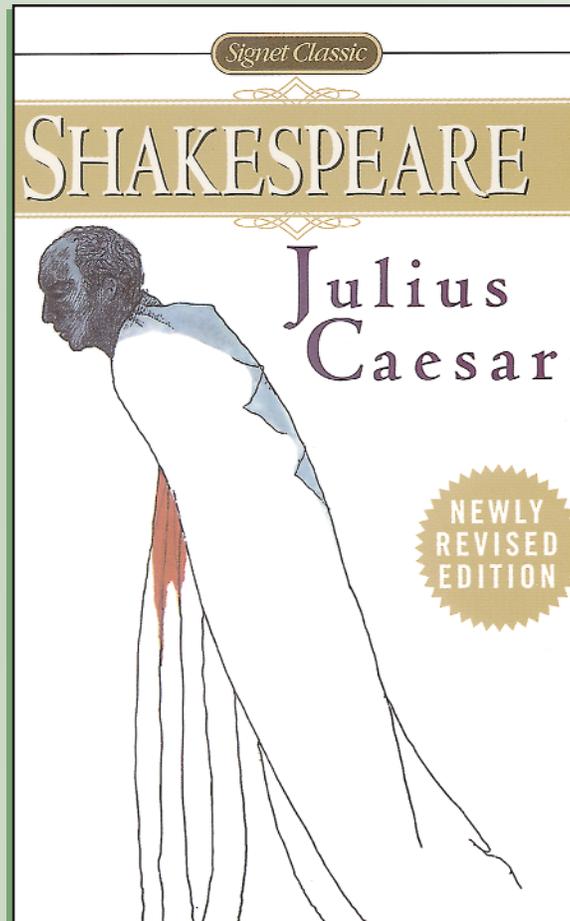


A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO THE SIGNET CLASSIC EDITION OF

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S

# JULIUS CAESAR

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## INTRODUCTION

*Julius Caesar* is an excellent choice of reading material for senior high school students. The seeming simplicity of its plot and the directness of its prose make it accessible to every reading level while belying a complexity that is revealed through exploration of the play's timeless themes and social issues. One of the most important of these is the question of what qualities make up a good leader. The play explores this question at length in its detailed examination of Caesar and Brutus as leaders. Students' awareness of the constant scrutiny to which today's leaders are subjected makes the play's examination of leadership timely. Students are quite opinionated about who is and is not a good leader. By comparing and contrasting the leadership qualities held by Caesar and Brutus, as well as many of the other characters, students become more aware of the careful thought that is necessary to choose a good leader.

Nothing or no one has more influence on adolescents than their friends. The issue of friendship and the importance people place on it is another issue explored in the play. Students will have strong opinions about the differing philosophies of friendship followed by Brutus and Antony. Lively discussions will ensue over the question of who is the better friend.

Another important societal issue touched upon in the play is suicide. The attitudes of the various characters concerning suicide provide a starting point for students' discussions on the topic. By discussing the play's treatment of suicide, students can explore their own thoughts and feelings about this sensitive subject in a nonthreatening forum.

This teacher's guide is organized in the following manner: a brief overview followed by teaching ideas to be used before, during, and after the reading of the play. These ideas are meant to help students understand the play (its characters, use of language, and central themes) as well as explore issues confronted in the play that have importance in the students' lives.

## OVERVIEW

**Act I, scene i: (A street in Rome)** Because Caesar has returned from his victory over Pompey's sons, the working people of Rome have a day off to celebrate. Flavius and Marullus, two Roman officers, are angered by the celebration because they see Caesar as a threat to Rome's Republican rule. They disperse the crowd and remove banners and signs honoring Caesar.

**Scene ii:** With a full entourage, Caesar marches through the streets of Rome. He has arrived just before the races that are a part of the celebration of the Feast of Lupercal. From out of the crowd, a soothsayer warns Caesar to "Beware the ides of March." Caesar dismisses the man as a dreamer and continues with his attendants.

Lagging behind, two Roman senators begin discussing their fears that Caesar will gain even greater power and take away the powers of their class of Roman aristocracy. Cassius, long a political enemy of Caesar, begins to flatter Brutus, a friend of Caesar. Cassius's flattery is designed to plumb Brutus's feelings about Caesar's growing power and to determine if Brutus is willing to join the conspiracy to kill Caesar.

Caesar returns from the races and sees Cassius and Brutus talking. He tells Antony that he doesn't trust Cassius because he has a "lean and hungry look."

Casca tells Cassius and Brutus that the crowds offered Caesar a crown three times and that Caesar refused it each time. This information adds to the misgivings that the men already have about Caesar. Brutus admits that he is dissatisfied and agrees to talk to Cassius later about his feelings.

**Scene iii:** (A street in Rome) During a violent, stormy night, Cassius recruits Casca to the conspiracy despite portents the storm seems to hold. In a further attempt to recruit Brutus, Cassius instructs Cinna, a fellow conspirator, to place an anonymous note in Brutus's chair, throw one through Brutus's window, and fix yet another note to the statue of Brutus's father.

**Act II scene i:** (Brutus's garden) Alone in his garden, Brutus decides that Caesar must be assassinated because of what he might become (a tyrant). The conspirators join Brutus and decide they will kill Caesar the next day at the Capitol. Brutus convinces them not to kill Antony because that would make them seem too murderous. Portia, Brutus's wife, enters after the conspirators leave and pleads with Brutus to tell her what is troubling him. Although he fears that she will not be able to bear the news, Portia proves her strength by wounding herself. After that act of courage, he tells her.

**Scene ii:** (Caesar's house) Calphurnia, Caesar's wife, sees evil omens in the night's storm and asks Caesar not to go to the Capitol. He agrees until Decius, one of the conspirators, plays on his pride with a flattering interpretation of Calphurnia's dream and convinces him to go.

**Scene iii:** (A street near the Capitol) Artemidorus reads a paper he plans to give Caesar warning him about the conspiracy.

**Scene iv:** (Another part of the street) A very nervous Portia sends her servant boy Lucius to the Capitol to gain news about Brutus. She also questions a soothsayer for news of Caesar's whereabouts.

**Act III, scene i:** (Rome--before the Capitol) Caesar ignores the warnings of Calphurnia and two others and goes to the Capitol. There he gives an arrogant speech and is murdered by the conspirators.

Antony approaches the conspirators, says he understands and forgives them, and asks to give Caesar's eulogy. Brutus agrees, against the wishes of the more realistic Cassius. When left alone with Caesar's body, Antony vows to seek revenge against the conspirators.

**Scene ii: (The Forum)** Brutus gives a logical, unemotional speech winning the crowd over to the suggestion of making Brutus the new Caesar. Antony halts the crowd's support for the conspirators with a masterful speech that plays on the crowd's emotions. Antony learns that Octavius and Lepidus are staying at Caesar's house, and that Brutus and Cassius have left the city because of the people's reaction to Antony's speech. He plans to meet with Octavius and Lepidus to suggest they join forces.

**Scene iii: (A street in Rome)** The enraged crowd attacks the poet Cinna and rips him apart because they think he is one of the conspirators.

**Act IV, scene i: (A house in Rome)** The triumvirate of Antony, Octavius, and Lepidus plan to pursue and destroy Brutus and Cassius. In their preparations, they coldly compile a death list of anyone who might stand in their way.

**Scene ii: (A camp near Sardis)** Brutus waits for Cassius's arrival by speculating that their relationship has deteriorated.

**Scene iii: (A camp near Sardis)** Brutus and Cassius argue violently over Cassius allowing his officers to accept bribes. The quarrel ends when Cassius learns that Brutus's anger is really the result of the news that Portia is dead. That night Brutus is visited by the ghost of Caesar who tells Brutus he will meet him at Philippi.

**Act V, scene i: (The Plains of Philippi)** The two armies meet and the generals argue over who is at fault. When nothing is resolved, they return to their armies and prepare for battle. Brutus and Cassius vow to win or not be taken alive.

**Scene ii: (The field of battle)** Brutus sends a messenger to Cassius instructing him to attack Octavius.

**Scene iii: (The field of battle)** Retreating from the onslaught of Octavius's troops, Cassius sends his trusted friend Titinius to see if the oncoming troops are friends or foes. Seeing Titinius suddenly surrounded by the troops, Cassius mistakenly believes they are enemies. Having lost all hope for victory, he takes his own life. Brutus mourns Cassius's death.

**Scene iv: (The field of battle)** Lucilius, masquerading as Brutus, is captured by Antony's troops. Antony honors him for protecting Brutus.

**Scene v: (The field of battle)** When he sees that the battle is lost, Brutus runs upon his own sword rather than being captured. Antony gives a moving eulogy over his body proclaiming him "the noblest Roman of them all." In a gesture of good will, Octavius agrees to pardon all Brutus's men and take them into his service. The civil war ends with an omen of peace for the future.

## **THE ELIZABETHAN ERA**

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1. After reading the Signet Classic Introduction, answer the following question: Why were the issues treated in *Julius Caesar* especially timely in Elizabethan England? (pages xxii-xxiii)
2. Use the issues mentioned on pages xxii-xxiii as a starting point for short research projects.

## **SHAKESPEARE AND HIS THEATER**

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If students are not familiar with Shakespeare's life and career or with the structure of the Shakespearean stage, it would be helpful to read and discuss "Shakespeare: Prefatory Remarks" in the Signet Classic edition of *Julius Caesar* before reading the play.

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## THE ROMAN FORM OF GOVERNMENT

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For a short research project, have students find out how the Roman Senate was set up and how it compares to our form of government. In the course of their research, students should find the meanings and functions of the following terms: Senator, Caesar, Praetor, and Consul.

### BEFORE READING

Before the actual reading of the play, it is helpful to make the students aware of the many issues explored in this drama. The following activities are designed to encourage students to think about key issues so that they will be actively involved in their reading. These activities can be done by the class as a whole, by small groups, or as individual assignments.

### THEME

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1. The qualities of a good leader is one of the play's important themes. To explore this theme, students can do one or more of the following:
    - Discuss the qualities possessed by a good leader. Generate a list of these qualities and choose a leader (from the student body, history, or the contemporary world) who exhibits several of them. Write a short essay on that leader based on the list of qualities generated. The essay should include both qualities the leader possesses as well as those he or she lacks.
    - Bring in articles from current newspapers or magazines focusing on current leaders. Discuss the leaders' strengths and weaknesses as identified in the articles. Decide whether or not the strengths and/or weaknesses are legitimate and relevant, or if they reflect bias on the part of the journalists.
    - Make a list of the leadership qualities that the class feels are legitimate, and then make a list of the qualities that they feel are a result of the journalists' bias. Compare and contrast the two lists and compile one list of leadership qualities that the class feels a good leader should have. Prioritize the list.
    - Examine the effect a leader's domestic relationships, physical condition, and/or athletic ability may have on his or her leadership abilities. Begin with a class discussion of these issues, and then have students research historical and current leaders who dealt with questions about their leadership abilities because of one or more of these issues. (e.g. Franklin D. Roosevelt, Gerald Ford, Gary Hart, Teddy Roosevelt, John Tower, etc.)
  2. Friendship is another major theme in the play. Explore this theme by answering the following questions:
    - How far would you go to stop a friend from harming your country?
    - How far would you go to obtain revenge on someone or some group who destroyed your best friend?
    - Is there anything for which you would betray a friend?
    - Which is more important to you, friendship or personal principles? Why?
  3. One of the most sensitive issues in the play is suicide. The following activity will help prepare students for this issue:
    - Research attitudes toward suicide held by the following cultures: ancient Roman, modern Japanese, and modern American. Compare and contrast these attitudes in class presentations or in written essays.
  4. The role of fate and superstition is another theme. The following questions help focus attention on this issue:
    - To what extent can we control the future?
    - How superstitious are you? Do you have any good luck rituals that you perform before important occasions?
    - Do you watch for omens before important events?
    - Do you read your horoscope every day, and do you follow its advice?
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## WHILE READING

1. Consider the question: Are the conspirators justified in killing Caesar?
    - Divide the class into two groups. Individuals in each group will keep journals during the course of their reading. Group one will look for evidence supporting the conspirators' actions. For example:
      - Caesar's physical limitations (I ii 95-131)
      - Why should Caesar be king? (I.ii. 135-141)
      - The fate of Marullus and Flavius (I.ii. 281-287)
      - Brutus's reasons for killing Caesar (I.i. 10-34)
 Group two will look for evidence refuting the conspirators' actions. For example:
      - Caesar refuses the crown (I. ii. 220-246)
      - Caesar's will (III.ii. 240-244 and 249-254)
    - At the end of Caesar's speech (III. i. 58-73), have students vote to decide if he should be assassinated. Have them defend their votes in a short essay.
  2. Consider the question: What are the qualities of a good leader? Divide the class into two groups. Individuals in each group will keep journals during the course of their reading. Group one will look for evidence documenting the leadership qualities displayed by Caesar and the weaknesses of Brutus as a leader. For example:
    - Caesar's strengths as a leader:
      - An able general (I.i. 32-24)
      - A shrewd judge of people (I.ii. 192-195 and 198-210)
    - Brutus's weaknesses as a leader:
      - Not a shrewd judge of people (I.ii. 307-322)
      - Rigid ethics (IV.iii. 65-83)

Group two will look for evidence documenting the leadership qualities displayed by Brutus and the weaknesses of Caesar as a leader. For example:

    - Brutus's strengths as a leader:
      - Puts the good of the country ahead of his own feelings (II.i. 10-34)
      - Inspires loyalty (V.v. 68-75)
    - Caesar's weaknesses as a leader:
      - Susceptible to flattery (II. ii. 83-90)
      - Excessive pride (III. i. 59-73)
  3. Language plays an important part in the play. Characters use language to twist meaning to achieve their own ends. Shakespeare uses varieties of language to develop individual characters.
 

The following activities help students appreciate the use of language in the play:

    - Have two students who are good readers read the following selections of the play out loud to the class. In small groups or individually, analyze the selections, focusing on the speaking style of each character:
    - Brutus's and Antony's funeral speeches. Why is Antony's speech more effective? (Brutus's straightforward appeal to logic and reason versus Antony's appeal to emotion through the use of irony, sarcasm, reiteration, and figurative language, creating images in the listeners' minds.) (III. ii. 12-48 and 75-254)
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Compare each character's speaking style to that of modern speakers such as Jesse Jackson, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Ronald Reagan, etc.

- The exchange between Marullus and Flavius and the Commoners. What are the differences in their language? (The tribunes' formal speaking styles versus the Commoners' use of prose and humor.) (I i. 178)
- Casca's nature as revealed through his speech. What does Casca's speech tell us about his nature? (Casca's blunt, colorless, no nonsense prose.) (I. ii. 234-294)

Note: There are many audio performances of the play that could be substituted for the student readers.

- In small groups rewrite a scene from the play into a modern dialect (i.e. valley girl, southern, New England, rural, innercity, etc.) and act out the scene for the class.

### **DETAILED STUDY QUESTIONS**

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The following questions can be used in a variety of ways. Assigned to each student or to small groups, the questions can be used as formal study guides, class discussion starters, writing assignments, a review for a test, etc.

They are especially useful for helping medium and low-level students follow the plot.

#### **ACT I, SCENE I.**

1. How does Shakespeare make the common people appear to be less than noble?
2. What are the people doing that angers Marullus and Flavius? Why does this anger them?
3. What actions do Marullus and Flavius take to correct the situation?

#### **ACT I, SCENE II.**

4. Why does Caesar want Calphurnia to stand in Antony's path during the race in honor of the feast of Lupercal?
5. What is Antony's response to Caesar's instructions? What does this suggest about their relationship?
6. What is Caesar's reaction to the soothsayer's warning?
7. What complaint does Cassius make about Brutus's behavior towards him? How does Brutus answer this complaint?
8. Cassius's story attacks what aspect of Caesar's makeup? What is this attack supposed to say to Brutus?
9. What does Cassius mean by the following statement? " 'Brutus' will start a spirit as soon as 'Caesar.' " (147)
10. How does Brutus respond to Cassius's attack on Caesar?
11. What astute observation does Caesar make of Cassius?
12. What faults does Caesar see in Cassius's nature?
13. What does Caesar mean by the following statement? "I rather tell thee what is to be feared/Than what I fear; for always I am Caesar." (211-12)
14. What does this statement show about Caesar's nature?
15. What story does Casca relate to Brutus and Cassius? What does Casca tell us by the personal remarks he adds to the story?
16. How did the people react to Caesar's fit? What does this tell us about their feelings for Caesar?
17. What information does Casca give about Marullus and Flavius?
18. At the end of the scene, what plans does Cassius make to sway Brutus to his cause?

#### **ACT I, SCENE III.**

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19. What wonderous things has Casca seen on this night?
20. What reason does Cassius give for the terrible storm?
21. What important news does Casca give Cassius about the Senate's plan?
22. What does Casius mean by the following statement? "He were no lion, were not Romans hinds."(106)
23. What instructions does Cassius give Cinna that will help sway Brutus to their cause?
24. What reason does Casca give for wanting Brutus to join their cause?

### **ACT II, SCENE I.**

25. What question is Brutus pondering at the opening of the scene?
26. For what information does Brutus want Lucius to look at a calendar? What is the significance of what Lucius finds?
27. Why do the conspirators want Cicero to join them?
28. Why does Brutus reject Cicero? What is Cassius's reaction and what does this show about his and Brutus's relationship?
29. What do the conspirators plan to do the next day?
30. How does Decius say he will make sure that Caesar will come to the Capitol?
31. What has Portia done to show Brutus that she is worthy of knowing his secrets?

### **ACT II, SCENE II.**

32. What strange and horrible things does Calphurnia report to Caesar that have been seen that night?
33. What does Calphurnia mean by the following statement?  
"When beggars die, there are no comets seen;/The heavens themselves blaze forth the death of princes."(30-31)
34. How does Decius convince Caesar to go to the Capitol?

### **ACT II, SCENE III.**

35. What is Artemidorus's plan?

### **ACT II, SCENE IV.**

36. Why is Portia so nervous and upset? On what errand does she send Lucius?

### **ACT III, SCENE I.**

37. In regard to Artemidorus's request, how does Caesar's nobility doom him?
  38. What is Metellus Cimber's petition to Caesar? What is Caesar's response and why does he give this response?
  39. What does Brutus instruct the conspirators to do before they go before the public? Why does he instruct them to do this?
  40. What request does Antony's servant bring to Brutus? What is Brutus's response?
  41. Why does Cassius object to letting Antony speak at Caesar's funeral? What reassurance does Brutus give him?
  42. What promise does Antony give Brutus about his funeral speech?
  43. After being left alone with Caesar's body, what does Antony promise to do?
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**ACT III, SCENE II.**

44. What reason does Brutus give for murdering Caesar? What is the crowd's reaction?
45. What final mistake does Brutus make in letting Antony speak?
46. Why does Antony read Caesar's will to the people?
47. At the end of the scene, what are the fates of Brutus and Cassius?

**ACT III, SCENE III.**

48. What is the significance of this scene?

**ACT IV, SCENE I.**

49. What are Antony, Octavius, and Lepidus doing at the opening of the scene?
50. Why do they want Caesar's will? What is ironic about this?
51. What is Antony's plan for Lepidus? What is his reason?

**ACT IV, SCENE II.**

52. What does Brutus tell Lucilius about dying love?
53. What practical instructions does Brutus give Cassius about their disagreement? What is unusual about this?

**ACT IV, SCENE III.**

54. What wrong does Cassius say Brutus has done him?
55. In response, what does Brutus condemn Cassius for doing?
56. What does Cassius threaten to do if Brutus continues to "urge" him?
57. According to Brutus, how has Cassius wronged him? What is ironic about Brutus's accusation?
58. To prove that he has been wronged, what does Cassius tell Brutus to do to him?
59. What is the real reason for Brutus's ill temper? Give all of the details.
60. Messala brings what ill news of the triumvirate's actions in Rome?
61. What reasons does Cassius give for not going directly to Philippi?
62. What reasons does Brutus give for going directly to Philippi? Who prevails?
63. What happens to make Brutus speed up his plans to go to Philippi?

**ACT V, SCENE I.**

64. What hope of Octavius and Antony is answered? What does this say about Brutus?
65. What does Cassius mean by the following statement?

"Flatterers! Now, Brutus, thank yourself;/This tongue had not offended so today,/If Cassius might have ruled."(45-47)

66. What ominous sign has Cassius seen that causes him to fear the coming battle?
  67. What does Brutus say he will do if they lose the battle? Why is he reluctant to do this?
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**ACT V, SCENE III.**

68. What horrible mistake does Cassius make? What is the outcome of this mistake?
69. What is Titinius's reaction to Cassius's actions?
70. What is Brutus's response to Cassius's and Titinius's actions?

**ACT V, SCENE IV.**

71. What role does Lucilius take upon himself? What was Antony's response to his masquerade?

**ACT V, SCENE V.**

72. What request does Brutus make of Clitus? What is his response?
73. What does Brutus ask Volumnius to do? What reasons does he give? What is Volumnius's response?
74. What does Strato do for Brutus? What does Strato ask Brutus to do first? Why?
75. What overture of peace does Octavius make to Brutus's men?
76. How do Antony and Octavius honor Brutus?

**AFTER READING****QUESTIONS FOR DEEPER UNDERSTANDING**

The following questions can be used as reading journal topics, essay topics, the basis for oral reports, class discussion starters, and so forth.

**Plot**

1. Scenes iii. and iv. in Act II are very short. Why did Shakespeare include them? What is their function in the play?

**Characterization**

2. Do you agree with Caesar when he says that Cassius thinks too much? Defend your answer.
3. Why does Brutus not want the conspirators to swear an oath of allegiance? What does this say about him?
4. How does Caesar's response to Calphurnia's fears add credence to Brutus's and Cassius's fears about Caesar?
5. What is the significance of Caesar's "north star" speech at the Capitol? How does this speech make you feel about Caesar? The conspirators?
6. What is ironic about the third plebeian's cry of "Let him be Caesar."? (III. ii. 52)
7. How does Shakespeare portray the common man in the play? How does this portrayal make you feel about the actions of the conspirators?
8. How does Shakespeare portray the noblemen in the play? How does this portrayal make you feel about them? Why?
9. In every disagreement between the two, Brutus never gives in to Cassius; he must always have his way. What does this say about Brutus? Why does Cassius always yield?
10. Compare Portia and Calphurnia. From your comparison, do you think Shakespeare's characterization of the two women was flattering or disparaging?
11. Outline the steps that Cassius takes to convince Brutus to join the conspiracy. Do you think Brutus would have joined had he realized how Cassius manipulated him? What does it say about Brutus that Cassius's plan was successful? What does it say about Cassius that he used such steps to attract Brutus?

12. Compare and contrast Brutus and Caesar. Are they similar or are they very different?
13. Compare and contrast Brutus's and Cassius's reasons for joining the conspiracy.

#### Theme

14. How does the fate of Marullus and Flavius fuel Brutus's fears about Caesar?
15. What is the purpose of the storm? What significance would it have to an Elizabethan audience?
16. Brutus is cast as a very idealistic leader in the play while Cassius is cast as being highly pragmatic. Of the two, which do you think is the better leader? Defend your answer.
17. At the end of the play, Antony refers to Brutus as "the noblest Roman of them all." Do you agree with his assessment? Was Brutus noble? Defend your answer.
18. At the play's conclusion, it is clear that Octavius will be the new ruler of Rome. What type of leader do you think he will be? Defend your answer.
19. The play is entitled *Julius Caesar* even though Caesar is dead by Act III. Do you think this is an appropriate title? If not, choose a more appropriate title. Defend your answer.

#### **ADDITIONAL FOLLOWUP ACTIVITIES**

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In addition to dealing with these questions, students can engage in some of the following activities:

1. Using the journals kept while reading the play, conduct a trial or debate to determine the guilt of the conspirators. One group will attack the conspirators, while the other group will defend them. Employ the journals to write an essay defending their positions.
  2. Using the journals as a basis, conduct an election between Caesar and Brutus. One group will act as Caesar's campaign staff while the other will serve as Brutus's. Design and present political posters, campaign speeches, video commercials, etc. to support their chosen candidate.
  3. Have students vote to decide if Caesar should have been assassinated. Have students compare their votes now to the vote taken after Caesar's speech (III. i. 5873). Did they vote the same way the second time? Why or why not?
  4. Write eulogies for Caesar, Brutus, Cassius, and/or Portia.
  5. Write a poem or rap to summarize a particular scene in the play or the play as a whole.
  6. Conduct readers' theater versions of key scenes in the play. The following scenes readily lend themselves to this activity:
    - The confrontation between Flavius, Marullus, and the commoners (I.i. 1-63)
    - The murder of Caesar (III.i. 31-83)
    - The funeral speeches of Brutus and Antony (III.ii. 12-264)
    - The triumvirate making their death lists (IV. i. 151)
    - The argument between Brutus and Cassius (IV.iii. 1-122)
    - The death of Brutus (V.v. 15-51)
    - The triumvirate's triumph (V.v. 52-81)
  7. What is the relationship between a person's individual faults and his or her abilities as a leader? (pages xxiii-xxiv)
  8. After reading Sylvan Barnet's "Julius Caesar on Stage and Screen" (pages 233-245), write an essay or present an oral history of the production of *Julius Caesar*.
  9. After reading "The Source of *Julius Caesar*" (pages 137-182), write an essay or present an oral report that compares and contrasts Shakespeare's play with Plutarch's original version.
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The Signet Classic edition of *Julius Caesar* has several excellent annotated bibliographies related to Shakespeare's times, his life, and his theater. Therefore, no additional references on these topics will be included here.

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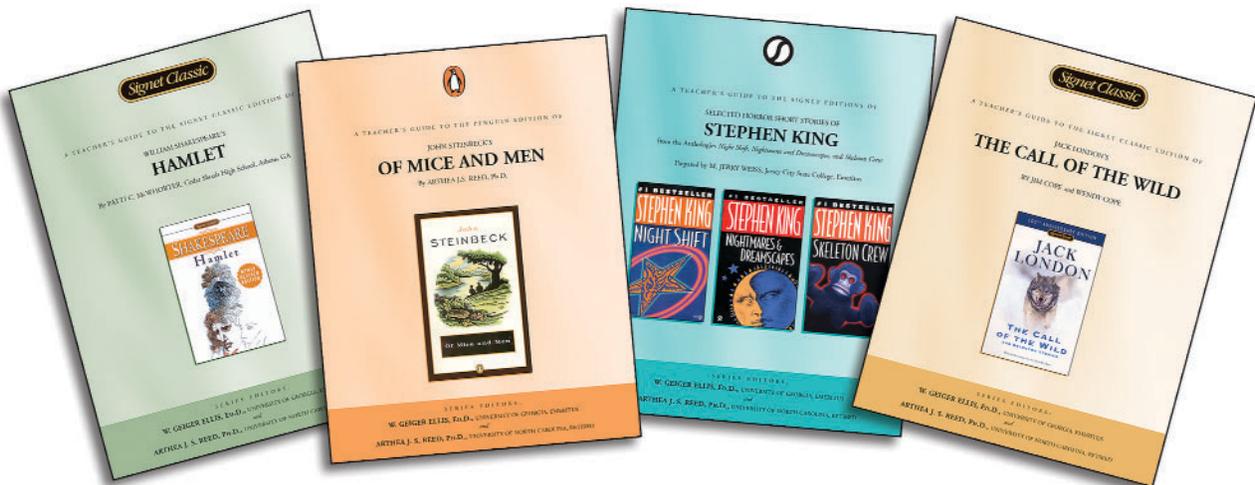
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