

JULIUS CAESAR | FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Shakespeare's language can seem scary, but give it a try! *Go at your own pace, and have fun!*



SHAKESPEARE IN PRISON

DETROIT PUBLIC THEATRE'S
SIGNATURE COMMUNITY PROGRAM

Julius Caesar, the leader of Rome, has just been assassinated by a group of senators. The senators, led by Cassius (CASH-us) and Brutus, thought that Caesar was trying to take too much power. Afterwards, Brutus stands up before a crowd of working-class citizens (plebeians) and announces that Caesar's assassination was a difficult decision but necessary to save Rome from dictatorship. The plebeians agree with him. Then Brutus asks Antony, a general who served with Caesar, to say a few words in Caesar's memory. This is what he says...

Julius Caesar: Act III, scene ii

ANTONY

Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears!
I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him.
The evil that men do lives after them,
The good is oft interréd with their bones;
So let it be with Caesar. The noble Brutus
Hath told you Caesar was ambitious;
If it were so, it was a grievous fault,
And grievously hath Caesar answer'd it.
Here, under leave of Brutus and the rest
(For Brutus is an honorable man,
So are they all, all honorable men),
Come I to speak in Caesar's funeral.
He was my friend, faithful and just to me;
But Brutus says he was ambitious,
And Brutus is an honorable man.
He hath brought many captives home to Rome,
Whose ransoms did the general coffers fill;
Did this in Caesar seem ambitious?
When that the poor have cried, Caesar hath wept;
Ambition should be made of sterner stuff;
Yet Brutus says he was ambitious,
And Brutus is an honorable man.
You all did see that on the Lupercal
I thrice presented him a kingly crown,
Which he did thrice refuse. Was this ambition?
Yet Brutus says he was ambitious,
And sure he is an honorable man.
I speak not to disprove what Brutus spoke,
But here I am to speak what I do know.
You all did love him once, not without cause;
What cause withholds you then to mourn for him?
O judgment! thou art fled to brutish beasts,
And men have lost their reason. Bear with me,
My heart is in the coffin there with Caesar,
And I must pause till it come back to me.

1 Plebeian

Methinks there is much reason in his sayings.

2 Plebeian

If thou consider rightly of the matter,
Caesar has done great wrong.

3 Plebeian

Has he, masters?
I fear there will a worse come in his place.

4 Plebeian

Mark'd ye not his words? He would not take the
crown,
Therefore 'tis certain he was not ambitious.

1 Plebeian

If it be found so, some will dear abide it.

2 Plebeian

Poor soul, his eyes are red as fire with weeping.

3 Plebeian

There's not a nobler man in Rome than Antony.

4 Plebeian

Now mark him, he begins again to speak.

ANTONY

But yesterday the word of Caesar might
Have stood against the world; now lies he there,

And none so poor to do him reverence.
O masters! if I were dispos'd to stir
Your hearts and minds to mutiny and rage,
I should do Brutus wrong, and Cassius wrong,
Who (you all know) are honorable men.
I will not do them wrong; I rather choose
To wrong the dead, to wrong myself and you,
Than I will wrong such honorable men.
But here's a parchment with the seal of Caesar,
I found it in his closet, 'tis his will.
Let but the commons hear this testament—
Which, pardon me, I do not mean to read—
And they would go and kiss dead Caesar's wounds,
And dip their napkins in his sacred blood;
Yea, beg a hair of him for memory,
And dying, mention it within their wills,
Bequeathing it as a rich legacy
Unto their issue.

4 Plebeian

We'll hear the will. Read it, Mark Antony.

All

The will, the will! we will hear Caesar's will.

ANTONY

Have patience, gentle friends, I must not read it.
It is not meet you know how Caesar lov'd you:
You are not wood, you are not stones, but men;
And, being men, hearing the will of Caesar,
It will inflame you, it will make you mad.
'Tis good you know not that you are his heirs,
For if you should, O, what would come of it?

4 Plebeian

Read the will, we'll hear it, Antony.
You shall read us the will, Caesar's will.

ANTONY

Will you be patient? Will you stay awhile?
I have o'ershot myself to tell you of it.
I fear I wrong the honorable men
Whose daggers have stabb'd Caesar; I do fear it.

4 Plebeian

They were traitors; honorable men!

All

The will! The testament!

2 Plebeian

They were villains, murderers. The will, read the will!

ANTONY

You will compel me then to read the will?
Then make a ring about the corpse of Caesar,
And let me show you him that made the will.
Shall I descend? and will you give me leave?

All

Come down.

2 Plebeian

Descend.

3 Plebeian

You shall have leave.

The Underlined Words

- interréd = buried
- if it were so = if that were true
- grievous = serious
- under leave of = with the permission of
- general coffers = public funds (one way Rome paid for its empire was by capturing people in war and getting their home countries to buy the captives' freedom)
- be made of sterner stuff = come with a harsher personality
- the Lupercal = a Roman holiday
- witholds you then = makes you hesitate
- some will dear abide it = some will suffer for it
- do him reverence = pay respect to him
- if I were disposed = if I wanted
- than I will = rather than
- parchment = sheet of paper
- closet = private room or office
- napkins = handkerchiefs
- bequeathing it = giving something in a will
- issue = children
- meet = right
- under leave = with permission

This speech is very persuasive... and manipulative. Let's take it apart a bit.

- Read the speech. The language is pretty simple (for Shakespeare), right? Why do you think that is? Think about who his audience is and what he's trying to tell them.
- Read it again. What is he trying to tell them? What's the main takeaway from the speech? Does he ever come out and say it?
- Now, read the speech and just look for the places where Antony changes tactics. Mark them.
- Look at each section of the speech. Think about (or talk it out, or write!) what Antony really wants the crowd to hear in that section.
- Do you find the speech persuasive? Can you imagine being won over by it? Why or why not? What's the part that's most convincing to you? Where does he lose you (if you're not with him the whole time)?
- What do you think of the plebeians? Why do they go along with Antony? Try not to judge them—just think about why they (or anybody!) might go from not wanting to hear Antony to supporting him and calling his enemies "traitors."



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You can respond to these in any way you choose:

Write

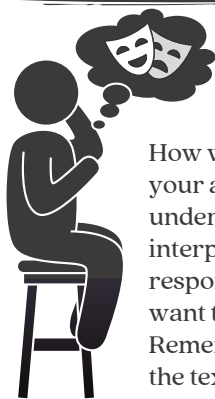
ACT IT OUT

Talk about it

Draw

THINK ABOUT IT

... up to you!



What's the most effective way to tell this story?

How will you make sure your audience understands your interpretation and responds the way you want them to? Remember to work with the text, not against it.

1 What does the text tell you about the world of the play?

- What happened just before this scene?
- Where is this taking place?
- Who are the characters in the scene?
- Does the text indicate where the characters are in the physical location?
- What other clues can you find in the text?

2 What happens in the scene?

- What is each character's objective? What are their tactics? Do they win or lose?
- Based on what's in the text, how do you imagine the characters interacting with each other? Do they stand still? Do they move? If so, when and where? Whom do they look at, and when?

3 What is the atmosphere (or mood)?

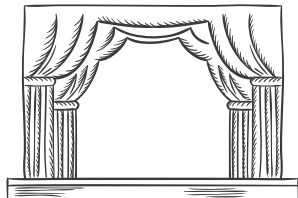
- If you were in the scene, how would you feel?
- How do the characters feel? How does that affect the feeling of the scene overall?
- Are there shifts? When do they happen? For which characters?
- What changes from the beginning to the end?

Perhaps you're thinking, "Oh, a dude giving a speech to a crowd. Ho hum. How many ways could there be to stage that?"

Answer: Roughly a zillion.

Directors of *Julius Caesar* have had all sorts of fun with this scene for hundreds of years... and now it's your turn!

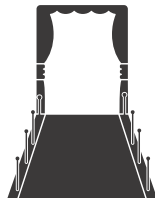
One of the most important factors when directing a play is the type of stage you're working with. As you go through the prompts, try out your ideas on more than one! No limits! The scene is yours to direct your way.



Proscenium

Proscenium (or "proscenium arch") stages tend to be fairly deep, with the audience all on one side, looking straight ahead at the stage.

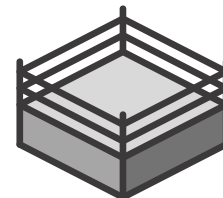
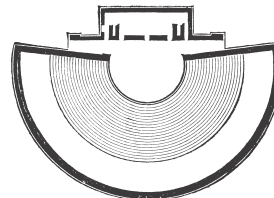
Sometimes there's a curtain. Sometimes there isn't. Sometimes there's a bit of stage called an "apron" that extends past the curtain line, and sometimes there's an orchestra pit in front of the stage. (Sometimes the pit is actually *under the apron!*)



Thrust / Modified Thrust

A thrust stage allows the audience to sit on 2-3 sides. It could be rectangular (like a catwalk), a semicircle, or even a partial polygon. Directing a play on a thrust means paying close attention to "sightlines"—your audience's ability to see the essential action in each scene. (*Hint: sometimes it's okay for an actor to turn their back on at least part of the audience, but it needs to be strategic.*)

Bringing the stage action into the audience creates all sorts of possibilities, but it's not automatically better than working in a proscenium! In fact, some proscenium stages split the difference with a thrust-style apron that extends into the audience area.



In the Round

Any performance space—no matter its shape—that allows the audience to sit on all sides is "in the round" (like a boxing ring).

This layout is probably the most challenging of the three in this pack. The director must be even more strategic with sightlines and movement than with a thrust—your actors will *always* have their backs turned to at least a few audience members.

Do you see parallels between this situation and any others? If those parallels are important to the story you want to tell, what do you have to do to make that clear for your audience? Think not just about the type of stage, but the overall look and sound of the scene.

Is your audience below the stage, on the same level, or is this theatre more like an arena where the stage is below most audience members?

The number of actors on stage is important. Do you have a cast of thousands? Dozens? Just a few people? What happens if Antony is alone, speaking to the audience? What happens if the plebeians are in the audience or the aisles? What happens if Antony goes into the audience or the aisles?

How would you cast the scene? What "types" of actors would you need?

What kind of acting notes would you give your actors to help them fulfill your vision?

When are you setting this? In Ancient Rome? Modern day? The future?

Changing the time period affects the location. Where else could this scene be happening?

What does the set look like? Does it have levels? Are there lots of things on stage, or is it minimalist or even bare?

How would you light the scene?

Would you include sound effects or music? If so, what kind? Or is the scene more impactful if all the audience hears are voices?