THE TRAGEDY OF JULIUS CAESAR

An Abridged Version of the Play Adapted for Readers’ Theater or Classroom Performance

This version of The Tragedy of Julius Caesar generally uses Shakespeare’s original language, with a few words changed and a few lines moved. It has been shortened to make it practical for production in middle school and up. It can also be enjoyed as a readers’ theater performance. Most of the stage directions [the notes in brackets, like this] are not Shakespeare’s but have been specially written for this condensed version of the play.

To Shakespeare’s cast of characters, this script adds six Citizens. They sometimes take part in the action, speaking lines written by Shakespeare for characters simply called “Plebeians” in the original play. Mostly, however, the Citizens in our version of the play help guide the audience. They summarize parts of the action that have been cut or condensed, and occasionally they clarify and comment on the action.

The script is printed on the left-hand pages, with some words underlined. On the right-hand pages you will find definitions of the underlined words, as well as occasional explanatory notes.
Introduction to the Play

Julius Caesar

Julius Caesar
CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

Julius CAESAR, a powerful general and leader of Rome
CALPURNIA, his wife

Marcus BRUTUS, Roman senator who joins the conspiracy
to assassinate Caesar
PORTIA, his wife
LUCIUS, their young servant

The conspirators
Caius CASSIUS
CASCA
CINNA
DECIUS
METELLUS CIMBER
TREBONIUS

Mark ANTONY, a politician and friend of Caesar
OCTAVIUS Caesar, grand-nephew and adopted son of
Julius Caesar
LEPIDUS, a senator who briefly rules with Antony and
Octavius after Caesar’s death

FLAVIUS, a Roman official
MARULLUS, a Roman official
PUBLIUS, an old Roman senator
POPILIUS Lena, a Roman senator
COBBLER, a witty shoe repairman
SOOTHSAYER, a mysterious fortune-teller
CINNA, a poet (not the same as Cinna the conspirator)
PINDARUS, servant to Cassius
SERVANT to Mark Antony

Soldiers in the armies of Cassius and Brutus
TITINIUS
CLITUS
VOLUMNIUS
STRATO

CITIZENS of Rome, including six with speaking parts
ACT 1

SCENE 1: ROME. A STREET.

[A crowd* enters, chanting “Caesar! Caesar! Caesar!” They continue chanting until CITIZEN 1 steps forward and raises a hand—the crowd freezes** and goes silent. CITIZEN 1 speaks directly to the audience, as do the other CITIZENS that follow]

CITIZEN 1 [stepping forward]
Welcome, citizens of modern times!

CITIZEN 2 [stepping forward]
We are citizens of Rome—ancient Rome to you.

CITIZEN 3 [stepping forward]
More than two-thousand years before your time.

CITIZEN 4 [stepping forward]
And we are here to help tell the story in our play.

CITIZEN 5 [stepping forward]
Well, it’s not entirely our play.

CITIZEN 6 [stepping forward]
True! This is our version of William Shakespeare’s tragedy of...
* This crowd can include as many people as the production allows, but needs to include at least the six Citizens who will speak to the audience.

** In a play, to freeze is to suddenly become motionless.
ALL SIX CITIZENS
Julius Caesar!

CROWD [chanting enthusiastically]
Caesar! Caesar! Caesar!

[CITIZENS 4, 5, and 6 hush the crowd.]

CITIZEN 1
The Rome we live in is a republic, wealthy and powerful.

CITIZEN 2
But our republic has been torn apart by civil war.

CITIZEN 3
One side was led by Pompey, the other side by…

CROWD
Caesar! Caesar! Caesar!

CITIZEN 4
As our play begins, Pompey has been killed. Caesar has defeated Pompey’s sons, and has returned in triumph to Rome.

CITIZEN 5
Which is why we’re parading through the streets, celebrating Caesar’s victory.
Pompey: pronounced *POM-pee*
CITIZEN 6
And, since it’s mid-February, we’re also celebrating a religious festival called the Lupercal, in honor of the god of fertility.

CITIZEN 1
Really, it’s kind of a big rowdy party.

[A short burst of happy cheering from the crowd—“whoopee, hooray, woo-hoo,” etc. Enter two government officials, FLAVIUS and MARULLUS, frowning.]

CITIZEN 2
But not everyone loves a party.

CITIZEN 3
And not everyone is happy that Caesar defeated Pompey.

[All CITIZENS merge back into the crowd, which again chants enthusiastically:]

CROWD
Caesar! Caesar! Caesar!

FLAVIUS [very annoyed, hushing the crowd]
Hence! Home, you idle creatures, get you home! Is this a holiday?
Lupercal: pronounced LOO-puhr-kul

**hence:** go away

**idle:** not working; lazy
MARULLUS [pointing to the COBBLER, at the front of the crowd]
You, sir, what trade are you?
Answer me directly.

COBBLER [stepping forth, and thinking himself a very witty fellow]
A trade, sir, that I hope I may use with a safe conscience, which is, indeed, sir, a mender of bad soles.

MARULLUS
What meanest thou by that? Mend me, thou saucy fellow?*

COBBLER
Truly, sir, I am but, as you would say, a cobbler.

[The COBBLER removes a shoe and pretends to sew it. The crowd laughs.]

FLAVIUS
Thou art a cobbler, art thou?

COBBLER
I am, indeed, sir, a surgeon to old shoes—when they are in great danger, I recover them.

[The crowd laughs. FLAVIUS gives them a cold look. They quickly fall silent.]
Act 1, Scene 1

**cobbler**: a person who repairs shoes

**trade**: a job requiring certain skills

**saucy**: sassy; disrespectful

* Marullus thinks the cobbler has insulted him, because he hears the cobbler’s reference to “bad soles” as “bad souls.”
FLAVIUS
But wherefore art not in thy shop today?
Why dost thou lead these men about the streets?

COBBLER
Truly, sir, to wear out their shoes, to get myself into more work. But, indeed, sir, we make holiday to see Caesar and to rejoice in his triumph.

MARULLUS [outraged]
Wherefore rejoice? What conquest brings he home?*
You blocks, you stones, you worse than senseless things!
O you hard hearts, you cruel men of Rome,
Knew you not Pompey? Many a time and oft
Have you sat with patient expectation
To see great Pompey pass the streets of Rome.
And do you now strew flowers in his way
That comes in triumph over Pompey’s blood?
Be gone!

The crowd exits, grumbling.**

FLAVIUS [to MARULLUS]
Go you down that way towards the Capitol.
I’ll drive away the vulgar from the streets.
So do you too, where you perceive them thick.
This Caesar would soar above the view of men
And keep us all in servile fearfulness.

[They exit in different directions.]
wherefore: for what reason

* Marullus objects to any celebration because Caesar has not conquered a foreign enemy but triumphed in a civil war of Romans against Romans.

oft: often

strew: scatter

** When CITIZENS 1-6 exit, they take positions near the stage in locations that allow them to be seen and heard by the audience. From here, throughout the remainder of the play, they will sometimes comment on the action but not take part in it. At other times, as specified in the stage directions, the citizens will enter and take part in the action.

Capitol: the national temple of Rome
vulgar: common people
thick: crowded together
soar: fly high
servile: fearfully obedient; submissive