
Reader's Guide

This reader's guide will help the student to gain insight into the story. Our enjoyment and benefit from reading is increased as we learn to artfully analyze and accurately evaluate what we read. As Christians, we also want to apply the perceptiveness and wisdom of God's Word to the things we read. Four areas are developed.

Identity and Characterization

Here we look for facts that tell who the characters are, what they are like, how the main character sees himself or is presented by the author, what his attitudes are, etc. We learn about a person's character by what he says about himself and the observations of others.

Individual and Society

In this aspect of analysis we watch for how characters fit with others, where and how they influence society. We might also consider comparisons with our own experience.

Author's Technique

The point-of-view of the author is a most important point to discover and track. Through whose eyes are we receiving the story? How does the author develop the narrative or the plot? What is the author saying? What is the theology, the politics, the philosophy that is being woven or exposed in the story?

Always be alert to note what the author is saying about himself, man, God, justice, grace, purpose and other eternal matters.

Vocabulary

List and define new and important words. Often the author will "coin" words or use technical terms that we should add to our vocabulary.

Introduction

Shakespeare wrote *Julius Caesar* in the year 1599. The play is about a people who lived two thousand years ago, yet it deals with personal and national problems that are as real now as they were then. There is a strong universal theme that comes to the fore again and again, both in literary drama and in the play's interpretation and analysis of human experience.

Relatively little is known about William Shakespeare, although his name and works are celebrated around the world. Reflected in his writings are many principles found in the moral law of God. When fear or hatred visit men, they are brought to sinful action. After they have succumbed to lust, greed or malice, guilt hounds them to the grave or, perhaps, repentance. Only the defiant few are able to neglect or override the influence of the biblical moral standard. The clear expectation of a society largely shaped by Christianity, effectively molded, in turn, the ideas of Shakespeare.

Reading of Shakespearean plays introduces us to an especially beautiful form of the English language. While some words and terms may be slightly unfamiliar, many phrases and sentences will be enjoyed and remembered for their charm, humor and insight. Throughout other literature, as well, we will find numerous quotes from Shakespeare. Thus, it is important for us to be familiar with the source and to appreciate the excellent literary dimension established by his hand.

Reading Savvy

Reading a play is quite different than reading a book. You must follow the dialogue, in order to understand *how* and *why* things happen. The most important ingredient of the dramatic plot is **conflict**. Opposition of an enemy, of society or circumstances will tend to interfere with the accomplishment of some goal. Watch for the factors that create conflict.

A second ingredient of dramatic plot is **suspense**. The author will try to hold us in a state of tension, so that we increasingly wonder how conflict will be resolved. Greek writers, thousands of years ago, developed five principles of dramatic construction. These principles are 1) the introduction, or exposition, 2) rising action, 3) climax, 4) the consequences, and 5) the outcome. Looking for these five principles will help us to dissect and interpret the play.

In the introduction the scene is set, the characters are introduced, including the main character, called the **protagonist**. Usually, as the atmosphere of the scene is presented, an incident occurs that causes the protagonist to consider taking action against the opposing force, the circumstance or the enemy.

Rising action brings additional incidents that confirm and reinforce the need for action. Collision of ideas or forces becomes more and more inevitable.

The climax sees the protagonist take action. His behavior is meant to solve the problem or end the conflict. This is usually the most exciting part of the play.

You may have noticed that the pattern of the play and the plot is a reflection of history, of the story of life itself. *Introduction*: God created the universe in a state of perfection so as to display his glory and power. *Rising action*: After placing man in the world and giving him dominion, Lucifer enters and tempts mankind, thus bringing about the fall. *The climax*: Jesus Christ, the Son of God becomes incarnate, taking upon Himself real, created, human flesh, and submits to divine justice on the cross. *Consequences*: Mankind is called to repentance and faith, based upon the work of the Messiah. Finally, *the outcome*: The Triune God brings down final and absolute judgment, separating the sheep from the goats, revealing and completely vindicating the Son and all of His elect people, many of whom have suffered in similar ways to His own suffering. God's manifest glory, power and wisdom will be completely revealed in this final showdown.

Thus, the model of creation and the history of the world is reflected in the way plays unfold. The various abilities of man are governed by what God has done. Man cannot initiate or truly create. He only is able to reflect or copy the things God has done. Realizing this gives us a start on understanding the structure of man's conceptions in literature.

Engaging Our Model

The play, *Julius Caesar*, consists in five acts. These acts correspond, for the most part, in purpose and development to the five movements of dramatic construction. We can, with this in mind, find the provoking incident, trace the complicating action to its climax, decide what is the probable effect, follow the various circumstances of the resolution of conflict, discover the moment of final suspense, and study the eventual outcome.

One of the fruits of reading and studying great plays is that we are, thus, inspired to consider our friends and acquaintances as, in some sense, characters. Think about some of the people that you have met. First they were strangers, then your impressions began to formulate your conception of their personalities. We learn to discern certain factors that describe the people that we come to know, to like or dislike, to love or fear. Someone who, at first, disgusted us may later have become a person we admired and loved. In a similar way, one who fascinated us at first meeting, may finally show himself to be foolish or wicked. It is somewhat a process of social interaction that is employed in the analysis of a play.

The main characters in *Julius Caesar* are historical figures, but they are also men and women. Shakespeare makes them seem to be genuine human beings. We should consciously apply the absolutes of the Word of God to the lives and actions of the characters, and try to make the same applications to ourselves. Remember, the author's purpose is to make us think, to "say something" important to the reader.

With a playwright such as Shakespeare, who was aware of the absolutes of God's law, we have the added value of being shown the true consequences of our acts. We have hope of some observation of ultimate reality, not only the irrational intrigue of miscellaneous Humanistic fantasy. Entertainment written by the pagan invariably attempts to prove that God is mistaken. Man yearns to live in a universe, perhaps a multiverse, in which eternal absolutes do not apply.

The Soliloquy

Hearing only the conversations of the characters might leave us with only part of the story of the play. For this reason the technique of the *soliloquy* is used by the playwright. This is a speech by one person, usually on stage alone, in which inner feelings, thoughts and/or intentions are expressed. We must accept this stratagem as the means for us to get a glimpse into the mind of the writer or of the character himself.

We may think of the soliloquy as if it were the conscience, a counselor or friend. With this we are reminded of those times and events when a strong word gives us better insight or direction, when our path is made clear.

Julius Caesar

by William Shakespeare

Act 1

Scene 1. Rome, A Street

Comment

1. A raucous mob coursing through a street in Rome is the opening scene. Although we are in Rome, the sense is *Elizabethan England*. English trades were ranked by the perceived distinction of the craft. The cobbler would be among the lowest of tradesmen. Thus, what is intended by the author in making a cobbler the leader of the mob?

Answer: He wants to imply vulgarity.

2. Note: There was a popular legend about a shoemaker who became a leader of the people and the mayor of London. Perhaps the author here intends a political comment on his own day.

Author's Technique

1. How and why is humor used by the author?

Answer: Shakespeare frequently used humor to show an unruly atmosphere. The shoemaker's humor is typical of his trade. He uses the pun on words of his craft: "all" (awl), "sole" (soul), "out" (out of shoes, out of temper), "recover" (save, mend).

2. What is said to the fickle crowd that sets forth an attitude of disdain?

Answer: One of the tribunes shouts, "You blocks, you stones, you worse than senseless things!" "Hence! Home, you idle creatures, get you home." These sentiments are well known to serious men who wonder at the gullibility and naiveté of the people in the street, those who are called on to vote.

3. Can you explain the *metaphor* used by Flavius of Caesar?

Answer: This has to do with a knowledge of falconry. The idea is that by pulling out certain wing feathers early, the falcon would be forced to fly at a height at which it could be seen and watched. He meant that if Caesar could be “plucked” presently, he would not become uncontrollable later. Let him know now that he is watched, so as to keep him from losing his head.

Identity and Characterization

1. Why do the tribunes, Flavius and Marullus, rebuke the commoners?

Answer: They are members of the aristocratic party just defeated by Caesar. They rebuke the relatively mindless crowds for preparing to give a hero's welcome to Caesar.

2. Who was Pompey? What was the outcome of his conflict with Caesar?

Answer: Pompey was the leader of the aristocrats. He had been a military hero before the present Caesar, but had been defeated by him in a civil war in 48 B.C. He had then been murdered in Egypt.

3. Which classes of Roman society are represented?

Answer: Commoners (plebians) love Caesar and his exploits. They want to reward him with a crown and more honors. The tribunes (patricians) had supported Pompey. They fear Caesar's growing popularity and power and resent his triumph.

4. Why does Marullus regard Caesar's latest conquest to be nothing?

Answer: He says that Caesar's latest victory was over Romans, the defeat of Pompey and his sons, not foreigners who might have enriched Rome.

5. Why does Flavius fear Caesar?

Answer: He fears his popularity and the blind praise of the people. He thinks Caesar will become a tyrant.

6. How is the “character” of the crowd revealed to us?

Answer: The crowd is fickle and thoughtless. The mobs had recently worshipped Pompey, now they cheer his conqueror. Moods shift easily and without much ground.

7. What are *tribunes*?

Answer: Tribunes of the people were officers appointed to protect the interests of the people. They fought for the “rights” of the plebeians. In scene one they try to protect a republican form of government from being canceled by the aristocrats who would like to allow the mobs to appoint a dictator (Caesar).

8. What is said of Caesar? What is the claim of Flavius?

Answer: Caesar is said to be too ambitious, he “flies too high” and is a danger to free men. He is clever to time his arrival in Rome to coincide with the Feast of Lupercal, when the crowds would be ready made.

World View

1. Are men more bold when they speak one on one, or when they are at the head of a crowd? Do they get their courage from truth and reality or from some other source?

Answer: In scene one we see “mob psychology” in action. The lowly cobbler was more emboldened when surrounded by a crowd. He would not have been so eloquent had he been speaking alone with a tribune. The cheering of his wit gave him strength. Being part of a large, vocal group tends to lessen the sense of responsibility. It gives a feeling of power. Little, selfish men often look at the world very narrowly, only considering charisma, immediate promises or gifts, or other shallow perceptions.

2. How might the attitude of the tribunes remind us of the modern day media?

Answer: Through appeals to shame or fear, Flavius and Marullus address the wildly cheering crowd, intending to honor Caesar, changing the people into guilty and ashamed individuals, looking for escape. They speak of how they have “fashioned” the crowd

and plan to handle other “vulgar” men with the same tactics. There is, again, an attitude here of contempt for others and exaltation of self and the ideals of the elite. The tribunes think of the people as below them. Only by warping the truth and making it sound plausible, they can control the masses who are like sheep.

3. What is the general summary of Act One: Scene One?

Answer: The scene presents the age old sin of living for the moment. It shows an unthinking crowd, cheering the latest media god or political hero. In this case it was Caesar, returning from yet another battle. Whoever promises a raise and less work will be applauded by those who can't, or won't think. From the discussion it is evident that a conflict is brewing.

Reading Savvy

1. What do we have as our *plot*?

Answer: *Conflict* - Caesar (secretly) wants to be declared dictator for life. He wants recognition and the support of everyone. The general rabble would go along with his desire, not thinking further of their political or economic loss.

A group of tribunes opposes this desire and ploy for power. *Suspense* - Tension is introduced as we see a possible conflict develop. So far we can see the introduction, or exposition of the play.

2. Who is the *Protagonist*?

Answer: The main character who sees trouble and the need to take action is a) Cassius, b) Brutus, c) Antony, d) Caesar

Answer: At this point we probably would choose a) Cassius, because he is most vocal in the attempts to persuade the others of the dangers of what is happening.
