

CHAPTER
6

Section 2

LITERATURE SELECTION *from Julius Caesar*
by William Shakespeare

English poet and playwright William Shakespeare (1564–1616) drew heavily on a translation of classical biographer Plutarch’s The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans for information about the Roman characters in Julius Caesar. Shakespeare’s tragedy, which was first performed in 1599, traces events before and after Caesar’s death. In Act 3, Scene 2, from which this excerpt is taken, Brutus first speaks at Caesar’s funeral to explain why he helped assassinate Caesar. Mark Antony, one of Caesar’s supporters, then delivers a powerful address. As you read his speech, think about how Mark Antony reacts to Caesar’s murder and how he stirs the crowd of Romans.

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 interrèd 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 answered 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?

“I come to bury Caesar, not to praise 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.
FIRST PLEBEIAN: Methinks there is much reason in his sayings.
SECOND PLEBEIAN: If thou consider rightly of the matter,
Caesar has had great wrong.
THIRD PLEBEIAN: Has he, masters?
I fear there will a worse come in his place.
FOURTH PLEBEIAN: Marked ye his words? He would not take the crown,
Therefore ‘tis certain he was not ambitious.
FIRST PLEBEIAN: If it be found so, some will dear abide it.
SECOND PLEBEIAN: Poor soul, his eyes are red as fire with weeping.
THIRD PLEBEIAN: There’s not a nobler man in Rome than Antony.
FOURTH 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 disposed 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.
[He shows the 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.

FOURTH 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 loved 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?

FOURTH 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 stabbed Caesar; I do fear it.

FOURTH PLEBEIAN: They were traitors.
 "Honorable men"!

ALL: The will! The testament!

SECOND 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.

SECOND PLEBEIAN: Descend.

THIRD PLEBEIAN: You shall have leave.

[*Antony comes down. They gather around Caesar.*]

FOURTH PLEBEIAN: A ring; stand round.

FIRST PLEBEIAN: Stand from the hearse. Stand
 from the body.

SECOND PLEBEIAN: Room for Antony, most noble
 Antony!

ANTONY: Nay, press not so upon me. Stand far off.

ALL: Stand back! Room! Bear back!

ANTONY: If you have tears, prepare to shed them
 now.

You all do know this mantle. I remember
 The first time ever Caesar put it on;
 'Twas on a summer's evening in his tent,
 That day he overcame the Nervii.
 Look, in this place ran Cassius' dagger through.
 See what a rent the envious Casca made.
 Through this the well-belovèd Brutus stabbed,
 And as he plucked his cursèd steel away,
 Mark how the blood of Caesar followed it,
 As rushing out of doors to be resolved
 If Brutus so unkindly knocked or no;
 For Brutus, as you know, was Caesar's angel.
 Judge, O you gods, how dearly Caesar loved him!
 This was the most unkindest cut of all;
 For when the noble Caesar saw him stab,
 Ingratitude, more strong than traitors' arms,
 Quite vanquished him. Then burst his mighty
 heart,

And in his mantle muffling up his
 face,

Even at the base of Pompey's stat-
 ue,

Which all the while ran blood,
 great Caesar fell.

O, what a fall was there, my coun-
 trymen!

Then I, and you, and all of us fell down,
 Whilst bloody treason flourished over us.
 O, now you weep, and I perceive you feel
 The dint of pity. These are gracious drops.
 Kind souls, what weep you when you but behold
 Our Caesar's vesture wounded? Look you here,
 Here is himself, marred as you see with traitors.

[*He lifts Caesar's mantle.*]

FIRST PLEBEIAN: O piteous spectacle!

SECOND PLEBEIAN: O noble Caesar!

THIRD PLEBEIAN: O woeful day!

FOURTH PLEBEIAN: O traitors, villains!

FIRST PLEBEIAN: O most bloody sight!

SECOND PLEBEIAN: We will be revenged.

ALL: Revenge! About! Seek! Burn! Fire! Kill! Slay!
 Let not a traitor live!

ANTONY: Stay, countrymen.

FIRST PLEBEIAN: Peace there! Hear the noble
 Antony.

SECOND PLEBEIAN: We'll hear him, we'll follow
 him,
 we'll die with him!

ANTONY: Good friends, sweet friends, let me not
 stir you up
 To such a sudden flood of mutiny

***"If you have tears,
 prepare to shed
 them now."***

They that have done this deed are honorable.
 What private griefs they have, alas, I know not,
 That made them do it. They are wise and
 honorable,
 And will no doubt with reasons answer you.
 I come not, friends, to steal away your hearts.
 I am no orator, as Brutus is,
 But, as you know me all, a plain blunt man
 That love my friend, and that they know full well
 That gave me public leave to speak of him.
 For I have neither wit, nor words, nor worth,
 Action, nor utterance, nor the power of speech
 To stir men's blood. I only speak right on.
 I tell you that which you yourselves do know,
 Show you sweet Caesar's wounds, poor poor
 dumb mouths,
 And bid them speak for me. But were I Brutus,
 And Brutus Antony, there were an Antony
 Would ruffle up your spirits and put a tongue
 In every wound of Caesar that should move
 The stones of Rome to rise and mutiny.

ALL: We'll mutiny!

FIRST PLEBEIAN: We'll burn the house of Brutus!

THIRD PLEBEIAN: Away, then! Come, seek the
 conspirators.

Antony: Yet hear me, countrymen. Yet hear me
 speak.

ALL: Peace, ho! Hear Antony, most noble Antony!
 ANTONY: Why, friends, you go to do you know not
 what.

Wherein hath Caesar thus deserved your loves?
 Alas, you know not. I must tell you then:
 You have forgot the will I told you of.

ALL: Most true, the will! Let's stay and hear the will.

ANTONY: Here is the will, and under Caesar's seal.

To every Roman citizen he gives,
 To every several man, seventy-five drachmas.

SECOND PLEBEIAN: Most noble Caesar! We'll
 revenge his death.

Activity Options

1. *Describing Plot, Setting, and Character*

With a group of classmates, plan, rehearse, and give a performance of this excerpt for your class.

2. *Drawing Conclusions*

Make a sketch of a costume that a character in this excerpt might wear. Display your finished costume design.