

# THEMES AND QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE

## PARALLELS BETWEEN *JULIUS CAESAR* AND *THE HUNGER GAMES*

**A**S YOU ARE READING OR WATCHING THE PLAY, some things might begin to sound familiar. Cinna? Where have I heard that name before? And then suddenly, your brain will make the connection...*The Hunger Games*!!!

That's right. *The Hunger Games* series pulls heavily from Shakespeare's play and from the culture of the Ancient Roman Empire.

One can clearly compare The Hunger Games themselves to the Gladiator games held at the Colosseum in ancient Rome. There, wealthier citizens would

watch poor ones and slaves fight to the death as entertainment. Suzanne Collins has said that the name of the capital, Panem, "comes from the [Roman] expression 'Panem et Circenses' which translates into 'Bread and Circuses'." This was a strategy invoked by rulers to keep the masses happy and docile. The thought was that basic food and good (violent) entertainment will keep the people distracted enough to allow those in charge to rule as they desired. Do you see any parallels in the play? What about in today's world?



*Julius Caesar*, Royal Shakespeare Company, 1991



*The Hunger Games: Mockingjay - Part 1*

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## ALL THE NAMES

Take a look at these overlapping names between the stories and investigate why Collins used them in her book. This is only a sampling—there are so many more to find!

### CHARACTER JULIUS CAESAR/ROME

### HUNGER GAMES

#### CINNA

Cinna a politician who participates in taking down Caesar (whom he presumes to be a tyrant).

Katniss' stylist for the games and the one who helps tie her to the emblem of the mockingjay. He is murdered for his subversive actions.

#### CAESAR

Julius Caesar, in short, began his legacy as a politician and grew into the role of military general as his conquests earned him more land and power. His rule was complicated, to say the least, with many loving him and many hating him.

Caesar Flickerman is the host of the Hunger Games and is adored by the people in the capital. His persona is contentious with some people saying he means well and others thinking he is very devious.

#### SENECA

A Roman philosopher, poet, and playwright. He is mostly tied to the philosophy of Stoicism, of which Brutus is the poster-child. In brief, Stoicism is guided by praising logic over emotions and finding happiness in the present moment and not to be driven by fear of pain or loss. In the end, Seneca was forced to take his own life for allegedly taking part in an assassination plot.

Seneca Crane is the gamemaker in the first book. Katniss' idea to have her and Peeta eat poison berries foiled his plans. For his inability to control the games, Seneca Crane was locked in a room with the same poison berries and never heard from again.

#### PLUTARCH

Plutarch was a Greek writer and his works on Julius Caesar were what Shakespeare used as a source for much of his play.

Plutarch Heavensbee was memorably portrayed by Philip Seymour Hoffman in the movies (his last on-screen role). He begins the story as the second gamemaker and seems quite diabolical, but is then revealed to be a leader for the rebellion and becomes the head creator for "propo" for the Districts.

**PROPAGANDA: INFORMATION, OFTEN MISLEADING OR BIASED, USED TO PROMOTE A PARTICULAR CAUSE OR POINT OF VIEW**

**FANS OF THE SERIES OR MOVIES WILL PROBABLY REMEMBER THE WORD, "PROPO."** A propo was a broadcast video that allowed the rebellion to stir up resentment toward the capitol and to create allies for their cause. Katniss' journey in the third book features her as the star of a lot of those videos. In the course of the play, propaganda takes the form of speeches, most dramatically when Brutus is followed by Mark Antony at Caesar's funeral. Note how the public is stirred and how the speeches work upon the public. However, all of them are beat by the master, Julius Caesar himself who coined a succinct phrase that has not only stood the test of time, but continued to plant him in people's imaginations as a winner, "Veni, Vidi, Vici" or "I came, I saw, I conquered."

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=S\\_AKxTIEGMA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S_AKxTIEGMA)

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

BEFORE OR AFTER SEEING THE PLAY

What do you think author Suzanne Collins was trying to say by tying her futuristic world to this one so far in the past?

Who does Katniss Everdeen parallel in the Julius Caesar story?

What can we learn from both stories?

Rulers believed that basic food and good (violent) entertainment will keep the people distracted enough to allow those in charge to rule as they desired. Do you see any parallels in the play? What about in today's world?

# THEMES AND QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE

## PRIVATE VS PUBLIC EXPRESSIONS OF TRUTH

**MOTIVATIONS, INTENTIONS AND BELIEFS ARE ALL EXPRESSED THROUGH THE WORDS AND ACTIONS OF THE CENTRAL CHARACTERS.**

A key tension arises from the juxtaposition of the expressions of individuals done in private and those presented in public to a larger audience. The tension between what is said and done in quiet moments of introspection and passionate discussion and what is said and done in extravagant and violent public scenes runs through the entire play.



Marlon Brando as Mark Antony in the 1953 film version of *Julius Caesar*

Audiences are given glimpses into both and can judge for themselves how what is expressed in private may or may not parallel those expressed in public. And by doing so, audiences can judge the quality, the honesty and honor of each character. They can determine what is the truth as it applies to each. Who is constant and who is changeable? The individual tensions between what characters say and what they do can influence opinions and our allegiances.

A key device Shakespeare uses for expressing private thoughts is through the soliloquy. All of the main characters have moments alone that reveal their true intentions and qualities of character. And no one more clearly expresses his honor and truth than Brutus.

Shakespeare creates the honorable Brutus from the very beginning. Audiences will soon bear witness to the violent assassination of Caesar carried out by Brutus and his fellow conspirators. But audiences also see and hear Brutus as he struggles with his own emotions and motivations when pressed to act against Caesar.

In Act II Scene 1 we heard Brutus giving voice to his concerns:

It must be by his death: and for my part,  
I know no personal cause to spurn at him,  
But for the general. He would be crown'd:  
How that might change his nature, there's the question.  
It is the bright day that brings forth the adder;  
And that craves wary walking.

In another play (*Hamlet*), Shakespeare has Polonius tell his son, Laertes, "to thine own self be true..." In *Julius Caesar*, despite all that has occurred, at the very end of the play, Antony describes Brutus:

This was the noblest Roman of them all:  
All the conspirators save only he  
Did that they did in envy of great Caesar;  
He only, in a general honest thought  
And common good to all, made one of them.  
His life was gentle, and the elements  
So mix'd in him that Nature might stand up  
And say to all the world 'This was a man!'

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

BEFORE OR AFTER SEEING THE PLAY

Find other instances in the play where characters say/do one thing and then reveal their true thoughts when alone.

How were the soliloquies presented in the production? Were the characters completely alone on stage or were others in the background?

In what ways, did the soliloquies of the characters influence your opinions of them? Did you find yourself changing allegiances throughout the play? Or did you stay on the side of one or the other?

What examples can you find in contemporary times where this tension between private and public seems to exist?

# THEMES AND QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE

## RHETORIC AND THE POWER OF LANGUAGE

**SHAKESPEARE WROTE PLAYS WITH THE INTENTION OF CAPTURING THE IMAGINATION AND THE ATTENTION OF HIS AUDIENCES.** He wanted audiences to join his characters and experience what he might mean to live inside the world of his plays. The primary vehicle for this was language. In all of his plays, each character's words are chosen deliberately and carefully to express the thoughts, motivations and actions of the individuals and to paint the picture of the environment—physical and emotional—that surrounds them. Every word written has the power to spark the imagination, to provoke questions, and activate emotions. While the words on the page may seem daunting, the important thing to ask is how might they be spoken and performed? This is where interpretations and choices are made by the audience, the actors and the director.

Shakespeare was acutely aware of the power of language. He was a student of English and knew the rules of grammar. Most importantly, he understood how to use rhetorical and linguistic devices to great effect.

Rhetoric is defined as “the art of effective or persuasive speaking or writing, especially the use of figures of speech and other compositional techniques” (Oxford Dictionary).



## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

BEFORE OR AFTER SEEING THE PLAY

Read the two speeches (aloud if possible) on the next page as well as the responses from the public.

Who speaks first?

One speech is in prose, the other poetry. Compare and contrast the following:

### USE OF LOGIC:

Brutus: Had you rather Caesar were living and die all slaves, than that Caesar were dead, to live all free men?

Antony: The evil that men do lives after them; The good is oft interred with their bones;

### USE OF EMOTION:

Brutus: ...Not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved Rome more.

Antony: My heart is in the coffin there with Caesar, And I must pause till it come back to me.

### USE OF REPETITION:

Count how many times honor, honorable and ambition is spoken in both.

### OTHER QUESTIONS

Why did the public change their minds?

How were the speeches presented in the production?

Did you find yourself changing allegiances from Brutus to Antony? Why or why not?

What examples can you find in contemporary times where rhetoric is used (and many of the same linguistic devices!)?

Poster for the 1970 film version of *Julius Caesar* starring Charlton Heston as Mark Antony

# THEMES AND QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE

## RHETORIC AND THE POWER OF LANGUAGE

One of the best examples in all of Shakespeare is in the funeral speeches in *Julius Caesar*. Brutus believes that he can use logic and reason to convince the people that what was done had to be done. He speaks in prose, the language of the common people, the

every day. Antony appeals to the emotions. He uses poetry to inflame the passions of the people and to persuade them as to the great injustice that was done not just to Caesar but to all citizens of Rome.

### BRUTUS

Romans, countrymen, and lovers! hear me for my cause, and be silent, that you may hear: believe me for mine honour, and awake your senses, that you may the better judge. If there be any in this assembly, any dear friend of Caesar's, to him I say, that Brutus' love to Caesar was no less than his.

If then that friend demand why Brutus rose against Caesar, this is my answer: —Not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved Rome more. Had you rather Caesar were living and die all slaves, than that Caesar were dead, to live all free men? As Caesar loved me, I weep for him; as he was fortunate, I rejoice at it; as he was valiant, I honour him: but, as he was ambitious, I slew him. There is tears for his love; honour for his valour; and death for his ambition.

Who is here so rude that would not be a Roman?  
If any, speak; for him have I offended. Who is here so vile that will not love his country? If any, speak; for him have I offended. I pause for a reply.

### TO WHICH THE PUBLIC SAYS:

Live, Brutus! live, live!

First Citizen  
Bring him with triumph home unto his house.

Second Citizen  
Give him a statue with his ancestors.

Third Citizen  
Let him be Caesar.

Fourth Citizen  
Caesar's better parts  
Shall be crown'd in Brutus.

First Citizen  
We'll bring him to his house  
With shouts and clamours.

### 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 interred 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.  
For Brutus is an honourable man;  
So are they all, all honourable 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 honourable man.  
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 honourable 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.

### TO WHICH THE PUBLIC SAYS:

First Citizen  
Methinks there is much reason in his sayings.

Second Citizen  
If thou consider rightly of the matter,  
Caesar has had great wrong.

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

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

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

Second Citizen  
Poor soul! his eyes are red as fire with weeping.

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

# THEMES AND QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE

## AMBITION: THIRSTING FOR POWER

### **A**MBITION IN AND OF ITSELF IS NEITHER NEGATIVE NOR POSITIVE.

Defined it means a strong desire to do or to achieve something, typically requiring determination and hard work. Ambition is also often accompanied by the desire and determination to achieve success. How success is measured can be through fame, fortune and/or power.



The Stratford, Ontario, Shakespeare Festival 2015 production of *Julius Caesar*

In *Julius Caesar*, ambition is primarily measured through the amount of control and power within the government. The play blends the personal with the political. Political (and personal) ambition is something to be gained and also something to be feared.

Governments are created in order to maintain some order and civility among nations/states/regions. In order to do that, governments are organized so that power is distributed to its leaders. In the case of *Julius Caesar*, the government was a Roman Republic and the leaders were representatives of the people (men only) who lived within the governmental boundaries. However, institutions are made up of individuals and if one individual becomes the institution ("I am the state") the distribution of power is disrupted.

Shakespeare's play brings into focus just how fragile this arrangement of representative government can be and how susceptible the power accorded to leaders is to overreaching ambitions. Julius Caesar was an ambitious man. He glories in his military victories against Pompey and while refusing the crown in the public, he hopes the Senate will bestow such power on him. If this happens there is great suspicion that he will use it to further his own gains and diminish the freedoms and voice of the people.

It is this suspicion as well as a great devotion for the republic that leads Brutus and Cassius and the other conspirators to devise a plot to kill Caesar. Brutus describes ambition thus:

... 'tis a common proof,  
That lowliness is young ambition's ladder,  
Whereto the climber-upward turns his face;  
But when he once attains the upmost round,  
He then unto the ladder turns his back,  
Looks in the clouds, scorning the base degrees  
By which he did ascend. So Caesar may.  
Then, lest he may, prevent.

What Brutus misjudges, however, is the as yet hidden ambitions of Mark Antony. Cassius realizes the threat Antony poses and suggests that they kill both Caesar and Antony. Brutus chooses not to:

Our course will seem too bloody, Caius Cassius,  
To cut the head off and then hack the limbs,  
Like wrath in death and envy afterwards;  
For Antony is but a limb of Caesar:  
Let us be sacrificers, but not butchers, Caius.

In the end, it is Antony (and Octavia) that proves the undoing of Brutus and Cassius. Antony's ambition to take control is greater than any desire to help Caesar. She is shrewd and cunning in her words to the citizens of Rome:

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.

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## AMBITION: THIRSTING FOR POWER

Antony goes one step further by purporting to know of Caesar's will:

Here is the will, and under Caesar's seal,  
To every Roman citizen he gives,  
To every several man, seventy-five drachmas.  
Moreover, he hath left you all his walks,  
His private arbours and new-planted orchards,  
On this side Tiber; he hath left them you,  
And to your heirs for ever, common pleasures,  
To walk abroad, and recreate yourselves.

The citizens are thus convinced which Antony acknowledges:

Now let it work. Mischief, thou art afoot,  
Take thou what course thou wilt!

Once cornered into defeat, both Brutus and Cassius give up their fight. As Brutus runs himself upon his sword he says:

Caesar, now be still:  
I kill'd not thee with half so good a will.

At the end, Antony and Octavia are the victors and their ambitions have only just begun.

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

BEFORE OR AFTER SEEING THE PLAY

Review the metaphor of the ladder that Brutus uses to describe ambition. In what other places, have you seen a ladder used in reference to ambition and the determination to succeed?

Take note of the strategies Antony uses to sway public opinion. How does the audience know whether Antony is honest about Caesar's will?

What examples can you find in contemporary times where ambition has caused great leaders to try to convince citizens of their power?

What examples of ambition do you see in yourself or others? Do you think ambition is good or bad? See the following article:  
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/hidden-and-see/201411/is-ambition-good-or-bad>



2009's *Julius Caesar* at The Courtyard Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon