

Test - JULIUS CAESAR

I. Short Answer (5 pts each - 35 points Total)

Directions: Please complete the following short answer questions. Each question should be answered with one paragraph (5-8 sentences).

1. Was Shakespeare's Julius Caesar a tyrant?

History is complex, and whether Julius Caesar should be considered a tyrant depends on how you look at it. Caesar's actions as dictator of the Roman Republic were tyrannical. He amassed significant power and used it to further his political and military goals. But you could also argue that Caesar was a talented and effective leader who brought stability and prosperity to Rome after years of political turmoil. It is true that Caesar was a tyrant, but how one interprets him determines the answer to the question.

2. Was Julius Caesar's fate sealed? Could he have avoided his death, or was it destiny that he should die?

Since historical events are a matter of interpretation and speculation, it is difficult to say for certain. Nevertheless, Julius Caesar was warned by several people, including a soothsayer, to "beware the Ides of March." Despite these warnings, Caesar chose to attend a Senate meeting on March 15, 44 BC. Here he was stabbed to death by a group of senators who were unhappy with his increasing power and perceived tyranny. Despite Caesar's overconfidence and disregard for the warnings, I believe he was unable to avoid his fate due to the complex political situation that surrounded him at the time.

3. What are the traits of an honorable person? Was Brutus honorable?

Honesty, fairness, and respectability are the qualities that make people and actions honorable. The definition of an honorable person is someone who places value on truth and doing the right thing - and strives to live up to these high standards. Brutus showed compassion and loyalty to others, going as far as to offer his life to please Rome. Despite Brutus working with dishonorable men who wished for Caesar's downfall, every action Brutus did was done for Rome's greater good. Even though Brutus drove a knife through the back of someone he claimed to love, I believe he was an honorable man who possessed an unwavering amount of patriotism.

4. In the play, what do storms symbolize for those on Earth? Discuss an example.

The storm serves as an example of foreshadowing in the play. In foreshadowing, we are given a glimpse of what is to come. Like the trouble brewing in Rome, the storm is frightening and chaotic. The storm is a foreshadowing of the terrible things that will happen to Caesar and Rome. In Act 1, Scene 3, the play opens as a violent storm rages. The storm is so unusual that, in addition to lightning that splits trees and high winds that create waves in the ocean, it causes unnatural things to happen as well. Casca describes the events he has seen in the capital. They include seeing a slave whose hand caught fire but didn't burn, being stared down by a lion in the street, hearing women talking about men on fire in the streets, and witnessing an owl awake and hooting in the middle of the day.

5. Using one example from the play, discuss how an animal is used as a symbol. What does it symbolize? Is it a symbol of one object/theme in or does what it symbolizes vary?

Every time there are adverse omens in the play, animals, especially birds, center prominently. When Casca talks about how fearsome the night that Cassius gathers the plotters is, there's thunder and lightning, but there's also the strange occurrence of a nocturnal bird showing up at the marketplace at high noon, shrieking doom. Calpurnia warns Caesar not to go to the Capitol because she's seen a war in the air, the domain of birds. Eventually, Cassius accepts that he must die in the battle against Antony and Octavius. He knows it is because two majestic eagles that fed from soldiers' hands were replaced the next day by ravens, crows, and kites – dark birds that filled the air with shrieking and spread a shadow of death over the army. Cassius knows the eagles feeding from soldiers' hands symbolize him and Brutus, two noble men whose fates rest on their armies. After the eagles fall, the black army of Antony and Octavius will spread the shadow of tyranny over the land, like those scavenger birds.

6. What is the role of religion or the supernatural in this Shakespearean tragedy? Discuss one example.

As the play opens, we witness a short display of Roman life. The citizens present seem to have a strong belief in the supernatural and its ability to solve everyday problems as well as some of the more complex. People turn to unworldly forces to guide them along as they follow a preordained destiny. In Act I Scene 1, the setting is the Feast of Lupercal, illustrating the connection between spirituality and everyday life. This festival is celebrated as cobblers and senators roam the streets. The feast honors the god Pan, the queen of fertility. This time is when infertile females are supposedly given increased fertility, as is obvious in the praise of Pan throughout the festivities. The main event is a race in which, through a certain method, virility may be given to the formerly sterile.

II. Main Characters (3 pts each – 15 pts TOTAL)

Directions: In THREE sentences describe the following main characters.

1. Julius Caesar:

Caesar is a general and the most powerful man in Rome. He begins the play as a victorious leader returning from battle. Rome even offers to make him king and he seems to enjoy his power, even though he refuses the crown. Seen as too ambitious by the conspirators, he is eventually murdered to protect Rome and its ideals as a republic.

2. Brutus:

Honor and nobleness are his most prominent attributes, but he is not always practical, and often naive. He is the only major character in the play intensely committed to shaping his behavior to fit a strict moral and ethical code. However, he is unconsciously hypocritical.

3. Cassius:

Cassius is a talented general and a supporter of the Roman republic. Cassius is sometimes petty, foolish, cowardly, and shortsighted. He dislikes Caesar's becoming a king in the eyes of Roman citizens. He leads his friend Brutus to believe Caesar must die. He is impulsive and deceptive, sending Brutus forged letters to convince him to murder Caesar.

4. Antony:

Antony is a general in the Roman army and Caesar's loyal friend. When Caesar is murdered, he flees the chaos but returns to shake hands with the conspirators. Speaking at Caesar's funeral, he proves himself to be a charismatic and manipulative speaker and turns the crowd against the conspirators. Together with Caesar's great-nephew, Octavius, Antony battles Brutus and Cassius' armies and defeats them.

5. Octavius Caesar:

He is Caesar's nephew and chosen heir, meaning Octavius will rule Rome after Caesar dies. He is also a close friend of Antony and raises an army with him to fight Brutus and the conspirators. Octavius, together with Antony and Lepidus, forms the next Triumvirate to rule Rome at the end of the play.