

EDUCATOR GUIDE

Story Theme: Page to Stage
Subject: California Shakespeare's Julius Caesar
Discipline: Theatre

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A view of the set of Julius Caesar at California Shakespeare Theatre. Still image from SPARK story, 2003.

SECTION I - OVERVIEW

EPISODE THEME

Page to Stage

SUBJECT

California Shakespeare's Julius Caesar

GRADE RANGES

K-12 & Post-secondary

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Visual Arts & Language Arts

STORY SYNOPSIS

California Shakespeare's artistic director Jonathan Moscone is drawn to the political themes in Julius Caesar for very personal reasons. As the son of slain San Francisco mayor George Moscone, Jonathan is only too aware that killing someone for a political purpose is never justified, and he crafts his vision of the play based on this deeply held belief. In the story, SPARK checks in on Moscone as he and the actors produce an assassination scene that brings the brutal and bloody reality of this powerful historical play into the present day.

OBJECTIVE

To introduce students to the notion of dramatic interpretation through the production of Julius Caesar at California Shakespeare Theatre, directed by Jonathan Moscone

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Group oral discussion, review and analysis, including peer review and aesthetic valuing as a group

Teacher-guided instruction, including demonstration and guidance

Hands-on individual projects in which students work independently

Hands-on group projects in which students assist and support one another

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES (continued)

Critical reflection on personal expressions and how they are seen and received by others

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES

To introduce students to dramatic production and the impact and vision of the director

To provide context for the understanding of dramatic interpretation

EQUIPMENT NEEDED

SPARK story "Caesar" about California

Shakespeare's production of Julius Caesar on DVD or VHS, with required equipment

Computer with Internet access, navigation software, speakers and a sounds card, printer

Cassette player, CD player, or computer audio program

MATERIALS NEEDED

Access to libraries with up-to-date collections of periodicals, books, and research papers

Pencils, pens, and paper

INTELLIGENCES ADDRESSED

Bodily-Kinesthetic - control of one's own body, control in handling objects

Interpersonal - awareness of others' feelings, emotions, goals, motivations

Intrapersonal - awareness of one's own feelings, emotions, goals, motivations

Spatial - ability to manipulate and create mental images in order to solve problems

Logical-Mathematical - ability to detect patterns, reason deductively, think logically



See more information on Multiple Intelligences at www.kqed.org/spark/education.

SECTION II – CONTENT/CONTEXT

CONTENT OVERVIEW

California Shakespeare’s artistic director Jonathan Moscone is drawn to the political themes in Julius Caesar for very personal reasons. As the son of slain San Francisco mayor George Moscone, Jonathan is only too aware that killing someone for a political purpose is never justified, and he crafts his vision of the play based on this deeply held belief. In "Page to Stage," Spark checks in on Moscone as he and the actors produce an assassination scene that brings the brutal and bloody reality of this powerful historical play into the present day.

At the core of Julius Caesar is the assassination scene. Following his triumphant return to Rome after defeating Pompey in battle, Caesar is murdered by seven of his advisors, including Brutus, one of Caesar’s closest allies. It is in this scene, upon seeing that Brutus is among the conspirators that Caesar utters the famous words “Et tu, Brute,” establishing betrayal as the primary theme of the work.

In producing Julius Caesar, Moscone faces the directorial challenge of making a play about the assassination of Caesar in 44 BCE Rome relevant to 21st century Bay Area audiences. Although many viewers may not know the play’s story, many know Caesar was betrayed and murdered. The effectiveness of Julius Caesar and many other classics depends largely upon whether or not the audience perceives the story as being relevant to their lives. This task is largely left up to the director to shape the action so that it supports and deepens an audience’s understanding of the text. Developing this understanding can be difficult, especially since in some cases the language, social customs, mores, and historical contexts oftentimes no longer exist, as is the case in Julius Caesar.

But Moscone has a personal and unique relationship to the story of Julius Caesar as his father, former San Francisco mayor George Moscone, was slain, along with city supervisor Harvey Milk, by former city supervisor Dan White in 1978.

Moscone stages a truthful depiction of just how violent and horrifying it is to take another person’s life. Spark records Moscone, the fight director, and the actors as they develop an assassination scene that reveals the brutality of such an event. Taking advantage of Shakespeare’s minimal stage direction [“They stab Caesar”], Moscone slows down the action of the assassination scene, allowing the blood to slowly seep from Caesar’s body over the course of a long a dramatic silence. In his production, Moscone expresses his belief that the moral of the play is still relevant, underscoring his belief that a political assassination is “never justifiable.”

Founded in 1974 as an artist collective, the California Shakespeare Theater is known for its innovative productions of classic theatre. During its 15 years in Berkeley’s John Hinkel Park, and its 13 years at Bruns Memorial Amphitheater, many famous actors and actresses have offered striking performances of classic characters, most of them Shakespeare’s. Although its mainstay is still Shakespeare, since 2000, Director Moscone has expanded the repertoire of Cal Shakes to include works by Anton Chekov, George Bernard Shaw, Tom Stoppard, and Jack London as part of its continuing commitment to rediscovering seminal theatrical works.



Cal Shakes Director Jonathan Moscone works with actors in rehearsal. Still image from SPARK story, 2003.

THE BIG PICTURE

Shakespeare wrote *Julius Caesar* in 1599 in between two comedies - [Much Ado About Nothing](#) and [As You Like It](#). The events in the play most certainly reveal that Shakespeare relied upon the account of Julius Caesar found in [The Lives of the Ancient Greeks and Romans](#), written by the historian Plutarch (45-125 CE). An English translation of this text was made by Sir Thomas North in 1579, and was published in 1579 and 1595.

[Julius Caesar](#) is Shakespeare's second Roman play, in addition to [Titus Andronicus](#), published circa 1593-94, and it is the shortest of all of his plays. The events of Shakespeare's [Julius Caesar](#) do not follow history in chronological order. Caesar's return to Rome after defeating Pompey's armies occurred in 45 CE. The Feast of Lupercal (an annual Roman fertility festival) mentioned in the play, did not occur until February of 44 CE. And, the Ides of March, foretold by the soothsayer to Caesar, did not actually occur until just before the Lupercal. Where in Plutarch's history, there is a full month between the plot to kill Caesar and the actual murder, in Shakespeare's play, this occurs into over the course of only four days. (There are also other, more subtle variances from Plutarch's history, which are noted in some of the books listed in the Resources list.)

In history and in the play, Julius Caesar was a member of the First Triumvirate, the three-man political leadership of Rome (which included Caesar, the Consul or chief magistrate of Rome, Crassus, a wealthy businessman, and Pompey, a successful and well-liked military general. Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* opens with the celebration of Caesar's return from triumphant battle with Pompey, with whom Caesar battles after Crassus dies, and Pompey moves to lead Rome. On the way to the town center, Caesar is warned

"Beware the Ides of March," though he dismisses the warning and proceeds to the Capitol. Caesar is offered the crown three times by the Plebians, and each time Caesar refuses, opting instead to preserve the Republic of Rome--though the third time, Caesar's fellow politicians realize that his resolve is weakening and that Caesar is tempted to accept. The next day, Caesar's closest allies Mark Antony, Brutus, and Cassius, suspicious of his temptation for the crown, make a pact to assassinate him.

The following morning, Caesar's wife Calpurnia warns him not to go to the Capitol, saying she has received an omen about Caesar. But some of



The assassination scene from California Shakespeare's production *Julius Caesar*.
Still image from SPARK story, 2003.

Caesar's advisors, including Brutus and Antony, arrive and convince him that to stay home would show his susceptibility to coercion by a woman's dreams, and together, they depart for the Capitol. On the way to the Senate chambers, a citizen named Artemidorus attempts to give Caesar a letter warning him about the pact to assassinate him, but Caesar waves him off. Only a few minutes after the session begins, the seven men stab Caesar to death.

SECTION III– RESOURCES

TEXTS

Holderness, Graham and Christopher McCullough. Shakespeare on the Screen: A Selective Filmography. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994. – A listing of Shakespeare films.

Kamm, Antony. Julius Caesar: A Beginner's Guide. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2002.

McCullough, Colleen. The First Man in Rome. New York: Avon Books, 2003.

Parenti, Michael. The Assassination of Julius Caesar: A People's History of Ancient Rome. New York: New Press, 2003.

Salomone, Ronald E. and James E. Davis, eds. Teaching Shakespeare into the Twenty-First Century. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1997.

Shakespeare, William, and J. J. M. Tobin, Herschel Baker, Anne Barton, and Frank Kermode. The Riverside Shakespeare. Houghton Mifflin Co., 1997.

Schmidt, Alexander. Shakespeare Lexicon and Quotation Dictionary. 2 Volumes (A-M and N-Z). New York, NY: Dover Press, 1971.

Arden Shakespeare Editions – Commonly thought of as the best annotated editions of Shakespeare's works, the 17 volume Third Edition features extensive notes and analysis by noted authors and scholars.

The Complete Works of William Shakespeare. The Reduced Shakespeare Company. The complete works of Shakespeare in a 97-minute play. Available on DVD, VHS, and Script. - http://www.reducedshakespeare.com/rsc_shop.html

WEB SITES

The Arden Shakespeare - <http://www.ardenshakespeare.com/>

Julius Caesar Project – A project of Scotts Valley Middle School in Scotts Valley, California including a complete set of resources to help teachers and students to stage a production of Julius Caesar. - http://www.svms.santacruz.k12.ca.us/portal/Julius_Caesar_Project.html

Julius Caesar Teacher's Guide for grade 12 published by Joel Sommer Littauer on the San Diego Unified School District Web site, including activities with specific references to lines in the play. - <http://www.sdcoe.k12.ca.us/score/Caesar/caesarchoice.html>

Luminarium – Resource section on 16th century Renaissance literature. - <http://www.luminarium.org/renlit/renaissanceinfo.htm>

Mr. William Shakespeare and the Internet - A comprehensive resource Web site for Shakespeare, including a complete listing of his works (including study guides and tales), timeline, biography, and links, as well as a special education section with links to help educators teach Shakespeare over the Internet. - <http://shakespeare.palomar.edu/>

The Complete Works of William Shakespeare – A project of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, offering the full text of Shakespeare's plays over the Internet (scene by scene). - <http://the-tech.mit.edu/Shakespeare/works.html>

The Lesson Tutor - Teaching Shakespeare – A teacher-authored, well-awarded Web site designed for K-12 teachers, with a set of recommendations on teaching Shakespeare in the classroom. - <http://www.lessontutor.com/rm1.html>

WEB SITES (continued)

University of Texas, Department of Classics – Web version of translated Republican Roman Constitution--

<http://www.utexas.edu/depts/classics/documents/RepGov.html>

MEDIA

VIDEO

Black Caesar. (VHS & DVD) (94 minutes) Directed by Larry Cohen. Image Entertainment, Inc, 1973. DVD Issued by MGM/United Artists, 2003. Starring Fred Williamson, Art Lund, and Gloria Hendry. – Violent 1970s “blaxploitation” film based on the story of Caesar about a small time crook who takes control of the Mafia in Harlem. A cult-classic that is still very popular.

Julius Caesar. (VHS & Laserdisk) English National Opera in a virtuoso performance of Handel's Shakespearean adaptation. Directed by John Copley. Pioneer Entertainment, 1999. Starring Janet Baker, Valerie Masterson, Sarah Walker.

Julius Caesar. (Audio Recording) An audio version of the Shakespeare play narrated by Orson Welles. Pearl, 1999.

Julius Caesar. (VHS & DVD) (116 Minutes) Directed by Stuart Berge. Starring Charlton Heston, Jason Robards, John Gielgud, Diana Rigg, and Richard Chamberlain. 1978.

Julius Caesar. (VHS & DVD) (121 Minutes) Directed by John Houseman. MGM Pictures, 1953. Starring Louis Calhern as Julius Caesar; James Mason as Brutus; Marlon Brando as Mark Antony; Sir John Gielgud as Cassius; Greer Garson as Calpurnia; Deborah Kerr as Portia.

Vineyard Video, 1999. – A highly regarded instructional video for teachers on how to teach Shakespeare, featuring 10 segments addressing issues with language, producing scenes for the stage, and historical context. (More information available at <http://www.vineyardvideo.org/shakespeare.shtml>)

Teaching Shakespeare: New Approaches from the Folger Shakespeare Library (VHS) (75 Minutes)

MEDIA (continued)

VIDEO

Teaching Julius Caesar. (VHS) (30 minutes) Video Learning Library, 1992. – One of a set of instructional videos for teachers on teaching Shakespeare plays and the works of other playwrights.

William Shakespeare's Romeo & Juliet. (VHS) Directed by Baz Luhrmann. 20th Century Fox Film Corp., 1996. Starring Leonardo di Caprio, Claire Danes, Brian Dennehy. – A compelling contemporary version of Shakespeare's classic tale that stays strictly to the text. An interesting film to use to discuss contemporary adaptations.

BAY AREA SHAKESPEARE

African American Shakespeare Company – San Francisco, CA –

<http://www.african-americanshakes.org/>

California Shakespeare Theater – Orinda, CA -

<http://www.calshakes.org/v4/home.html>

Marin Shakespeare Company – San Rafael, CA -

<http://www.marinshakespeare.org>

Napa Valley Shakespeare Festival – Napa, CA -

<http://www.napashakespeare.org>

Nevada Shakespeare Company – Reno, NV -

<http://www.nevada-shakespeare.org>

Oregon Shakespeare Festival – Ashland, OR -

<http://www.orshakes.org> – One of the nation's most prestigious and accomplished Shakespeare theatre companies.

Sacramento Shakespeare Festival – City Theatre at Sacramento City College -

<http://www.scc.losrios.edu/~theatre/index.html>

San Francisco Shakespeare Festival – San Francisco, CA - <http://www.sfshakes.org>

Shakespeare Etc. – Emeryville, CA -

<http://www.shakespeare-etc.com>

Shakespeare Santa Cruz – Santa Cruz, CA -

<http://www.shakespearesantacruz.org/>

BAY AREA SHAKESPEARE (continued)

Shady Shakespeare Theatre Company – San Jose, CA
<http://www.shadyshakes.org>

Valley Shakespeare Festival – Dublin, CA –
<http://www.valleyshakes.org>

Willits Shakespeare Company – P.O. Box 756, Willits,
CA 95490

SECTION IV – VOCABULARY

DISCIPLINE-BASED VOCABULARY AND CONCEPTS IN THE SPARK STORY

Actor

A person who performs a role in a play, work of theatre or movie

Blocking

The planning and working out of the movements of actors on stage

Denouement

The final resolution of the conflict of a play

Director

The person who oversees the entire process of staging a production

Designer

The person who oversees the creative process of developing and executing aesthetic or functional designs in a production, such as costumes, lighting, sets and makeup

Dramaturge

A person who provides specific in-depth knowledge and literary resources to a director, producer, actors and even the audience in regards to a play

Et tu, Brute? (Latin)

Directly translated: "And thou, Brutus?"; in modern terms, "And you, Brutus?"

Elizabethan Theatre

The theatre of England during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I (1558-1603); the term is also often used to refer the period of time up until and including the close of theatres in 1640

Cue

A sound, line, or action that signals a performer's entrance, action, or dialogue

Costume

Clothing worn by the actor on stage during a performance

Fight call

A time before performance or in rehearsal when the fights are run at a slow speed to mark the movements building to performance speed

Fight director A person who choreographs or sets the fights and stage violence within a play

Flat

A set piece generally built of muslin stretched over a frame to be painted and used as scenery for a production

Machinations

The process of plotting against someone or crafty schemes

Production meeting

A meeting in which the technical aspects of a production are decided by the designers and the director

Proscenium

The view of the stage for the audience (also called a proscenium arch). The archway is in a sense the frame for the stage as defined by the boundaries of the stage beyond which a viewer cannot see

Physical action

The act of movement by the actor in the play

Preview performances

Performances for the paying public prior to opening night where things are still being changed to improve the play

Stage direction

Directing actors to move to certain areas of the stage as in; center stage, downstage, stage left, stage right and upstage

Stage manager

The director's liaison backstage during rehearsal and performance; the stage manager is responsible for the running of each performance

Technical director

The person who oversees all of the technical aspects of a production, such as lighting, set, and sound

Through-line

An element of the play that is carried through the entire piece, such as a character's journey through the story

Verbal action

The act of using one's voice to express words or emotion in a play

SECTION V – ENGAGING WITH SPARK

STANDARDS-BASED ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION POINTS

The assumption behind these activities is that students will experience a complete version of Julius Caesar, either on film, television, or at a theatre (preferred). There are a number of video versions available on VHS and DVD listed in the Resources section of this Guide.

Assassination – Engaging with the Moral Issues

Discuss the Julius Caesar story and the plot with students. Use the following questions as prompts:

- What is the story about?
- What is the message or moral of the story?

Explore the theme of betrayal in Julius Caesar with the class. Ask students if they have ever felt betrayed and why? Talk about the concepts of justice and retribution as illustrated in the story.

Invite students to consider three individual characters in Julius Caesar, such as Caesar, Brutus, and Cassius. Prepare students to act as lawyers in the trials of the three characters. Challenge three students to be the characters defending themselves, three students to be the prosecuting lawyers, and three students to be the defensive lawyers. Stage a mock trial in the classroom with the remainder of the class acting as the jury for each case. At the end of each trial, ask the student jury to offer a verdict as to whether or not the character was justified or not.

Introduce the political dimensions of the Julius Caesar story through comparison with other assassinations in history, such as those of Laurent Kabila (African Congo), Mr. Om Radsady (Cambodia), and John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King Jr., Medgar Evers, Abraham Lincoln (all US). The people who perpetrated the assassinations are also significant, such as Augustus Pinochet, Idi Amin, Mao Tse Tung (China) and Adolf Hitler. What were their motivations? Discuss the assassinations in the context of the political climate and the events that led up to and followed the murders.

Working in small groups, ask students to research newspaper articles, documentaries, and television news broadcasts about the assassins and to assemble basic “profiles” of the assassins and their actions. Each group should then present their findings to the class.

Conclude the exercise by returning to the moral issues and the theme of justification:

- Is assassination ever justified? Does the end justify the means?
- How do contemporary assassinations compare with that of Julius Caesar?
- Does the media influence the way we “read” or understand the event?

MEDIA SPARKLERS:

- * Investigate the media coverage of an assassination or assassination attempt, comparing TV and newspaper coverage where possible. Weigh up how this impacts on perception of the event.
- * Assess the ways in which personal frame of reference informs understanding or the “reading” of the media coverage of an assassination. For example does age, gender, political conviction etc influence response?

RELATED STANDARDS

THEATRE

Grade 7

4.0 AESTHETIC VALUING

Derivation of Meaning from Works of Theatre

4.2 Explain how cultural influences affect the content or meaning of works of theatre.

Grades 9-12: (Proficient)

3.0 HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

Understanding the Historical Contributions and Cultural Dimensions of Theatre

3.2 Describe the ways in which playwrights reflect and influence their culture in such works

Roman History as Context

After watching the play, ask students to choose ONE aspect of Roman history circa 44 BC to research, including language, politics, architecture, food, entertainment, geography, marriage customs and women's rights, commerce and economics, and agriculture and industry. Students should assemble different types of resources on their topic, such as recipes, drawings, photographs, descriptions, letters, audio recordings, etc.

Ask students to write a 500-600 word report on their topic collating the different forms of documentation into the report in a structured way. Make the reports available for the whole class to read and discuss.

Exploring the language of Elizabethan Theatre

Look at and discuss Elizabethan times and Elizabethan theatre. Look specifically at how language was used to express ideas and feelings. Make a list of words and phrases used in Elizabethan plays and poetry. Challenge students to conduct research on plays and performance in Elizabethan times and then to compare it with the types and forms of entertainment they watch. Ask students to write a short 500-word paper comparing and contrasting the different forms.

- How does each form of entertainment communicate? What are its languages?
- What are the visual elements? Aural elements? Spoken elements? Musical elements?
- How are the two different or similar?
- Does one style use more spoken language than the other?
- Does one style use more action than the other?

Using Julius Caesar or another Shakespeare play, talk as a group about the lengthy soliloquies and speeches peppered throughout. Discuss as a group the difference between these substantial orations and the obligations to listen to them, versus students' contemporary parallels in movies and on television. Compare Mark Antony's "Friends, Romans, Countrymen" speech to sound bite on the news. Compare Hamlet's "To Be or Not To Be" soliloquy to a television sitcom. Why did Shakespeare have such lengthy verse? What do such long verses accomplish? Challenge students to

condense a lengthy speech or soliloquy into 4 or 5 sentences. Then read both aloud and ask the students to gauge their effectiveness.

As an alternative to this activity, divide students into small groups and challenge each group to read through the assassination scene from Julius Caesar or any other scene from a Shakespeare play, and to translate it into their own words. Identify dictionaries and/or lexicons available to students to look up words and phrases. Encourage students to ask questions of the entire class if there is a word or idea they do not understand, working each one out as a group. Figure out the context within the scene if the group is unable to determine a meaning, working back from the context to discover the meaning of the word.

Once each student feels good about their translation, ask them to stage their version of the scene in a certain style or genre, such as Shakespeare, Western, Mystery, Science Fiction, Romance, Comedy, etc. While staging in a specific genre encourage students to add words that would be appropriate to that style. This will help the students understand the text and to make it their own.

SPARKLERS:

- * Consider the many different motivations for war in Julius Caesar. Talk about war mongering, and whether or not such actions are ever justified.
- * Compare the situations in Julius Caesar with US invasion of Iraq in 2003.

RELATED STANDARDS

THEATRE

Grade 9-12

2.0 CREATIVE EXPRESSION

Creating, Performing, and Participating in Theatre
Students apply processes and skills in acting, directing, designing, and script writing to create formal and informal theatre, film/videos, and electronic media productions and to perform in them.

Development of Theatrical Skills

2.1 Make acting choices, using script analysis, character research, reflection, and revision through the rehearsal process.

Creation/Invention in Theatre

2.2 Write dialogues and scenes, applying basic dramatic structure: exposition, complication, conflict, crises, climax, and resolution.

Director's Choices in Julius Caesar

Watch the SPARK episode before and/or after seeing Julius Caesar. Discuss the choices made in the direction of a work of theatre, asking students to identify how a director's choices affect the outcome of performance.

In the Cal Shakes Julius Caesar production there is a lot of action in between the lines "Speak hands for me!" and "Et tu, Brute?" Compare this solution to the fact that the only stage direction offered by Shakespeare in his text is, [They stab Caesar]. In Jonathan Moscone's production, Caesar is stabbed seven times and he then falls on top of Brutus, eventually stroking Brutus' hair as he utters his last line - "Et tu, Brute?"

Ask students how they might direct this scene differently? Play out different ways that the scene could be staged. Talk about how different versions would affect the outcome or feeling conveyed by the story?

For more information about SPARK and its educational content, including the Visual & Performing Arts Standards, visit the Web site at <http://www.kqed.org/spark/education>.



For more information about the California Visual & Performing Arts Standards, visit the California Department of Education at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/>