



## [Julius Caesar](#), by William Shakespeare

### **In A Nutshell**

*Julius Caesar* is a tragedy by William Shakespeare about a political conspiracy against Roman leader Julius Caesar, and the events surrounding and following his assassination. Shakespeare wrote *Julius Caesar* after he had completed a series of English political histories, and though the play is set in ancient Rome, it isn't without sixteenth century English political considerations. The play deals with the importance of upholding the ideals of the Roman Republic, but these were fairly contrary to monarchical rule in contemporary England. The play dates to 1599, when the hot topic in England was who might succeed Elizabeth I, the Virgin Queen, who would be leaving the crown without an heir. The play focuses on the question of whether rulers who take the crown are fit for it, especially in the eyes of the people (the ruler's subjects). However, the play isn't an anti-monarchy tirade. Shakespeare doesn't object to coronation; rather, he implies that those crowned should be good leaders. *Julius Caesar* is a play about power, but it's also Elizabethan England's answer to ancient Rome. It argues that power concentrated in capable hands is not an affront to the common good, but in fact, its only guarantor.

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## Big Picture Study Questions

- 1 Is Cassius responsible for turning Brutus 's thoughts to murdering Caesar? That 's usually the claim, but Brutus and Cassius talked about how Brutus was vexed by his own personal thoughts before Cassius even brings up the murder. Is there any indication that Brutus had earlier thought of killing Caesar? Why would he?
- 2 In the play, what type of ruler does the average Roman citizen want? A king? An arrogant and confident ruler? Someone who uses reason and acts honorably?
- 3 Wives seem kind of superfluous to this play. Even Brutus, who loves Portia, seems to treat her unkindly. Could this whole tragedy have been avoided if the women had been heeded? Why is what some might call "woman 's intuition" dismissed in the play as cowardice and foolishness?

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