



*The cast of APT's 2020 Zoom Reading of Shakespeare's Julius Caesar.*

## Ways to Use APT's Julius Caesar Play Reading in Your Classroom

For your convenience, we've summarized seven different approaches on using APT's 2020 Zoom production of *Julius Caesar* in your classroom. We believe these approaches are diverse and fulfilling enough to reach your goals for the class, as well as maximize your students' engagement. *Bonne chance*, *buena suerte*, and *Vielen Glück*.

### 1. Historical Context

*Context frames the story.* Providing your students with a few simple lines of historical context (e.g. Rome's deeply rooted hate of kings. Every Roman's duty to preserve freedom. An educated, wealthy ruling class that rules over the masses. Stoicism meant a life led by logic with complete control of emotions.) A discussion of a few key historical elements will help students to frame the story within the political and social context of the time.

## **2. Political Context**

*Context frames the story.* A pre-discussion centered on the balance of power between citizen and government (e.g. Who should lead? How much power should one person yield? How is social and political change made? Riot, assassination, change of leadership?) Viewing scenes of political and social discourse *only* (i.e. Brutus' "Lowliness is young ambition's ladder" Act 2 Scene 1, or Antony's "These many men shall die" Act 4 Scene 1) as an anchor for discourse about the current social political climate in the United States.

## **3. Human Context Straight Through**

*Context frames the story.* Frame *Julius Caesar* solely as the story of a good person trying to do the right thing. Letting go of Rome and politics and focusing solely on following Brutus' journey of "Doing the Right Thing" - the choices made, the consequences that ensue, but, perhaps most importantly, the *way* Brutus decided to make those choices. Support discourse that identifies the choices before Brutus (i.e. let his country be ruled by a king or prevent it), his method of choosing (i.e. "crush him in the shell", and, before the next scene unfolds, have students predict the outcome i.e. celebrated as a hero; shun as an outcast, but will have served a greater good, will change his mind, etc.). Keep the story focused on a single character's path through the world.

## **4. No Context Straight Through**

*Let your students frame the context.* Viewing *Julius Caesar* with no pre-discussion or historical context. Having your students identify and pursue the context that speaks most strongly to them. Addressing any political, social, or historical context *only* when sought by the student. Pause and discuss at the end of each of the five acts, allowing students to summarize and predict unfolding events and relationships. After completing the play, discussion may also be directed to any one or all of the contexts that were not discussed previously.

## **5. Copy the Scene**

This is a variation of students reading the play aloud. Identify the 'key scenes' that you find most important for your class. Provide any context or pre-discussion for the play. Begin viewing *Julius Caesar*. Before viewing a 'key scene,' pause and cast the scene from the class. Tell your actors to watch their characters carefully as the scene unfolds, identifying changes in volume, tone, emotion, etc. After viewing the scene, have your actors read the scene again using the APT actors as inspiration. Your student actors can mimic, generalize or even contradict the choices of the APT actors in their own version. This allows some context and feel of the scene for both your actors and their audience. Only those 'key scenes' should be performed while viewing or summarizing the scenes in between.

## **6. Version Comparison**

There are a number of versions of *Julius Caesar* available for use in a classroom. Collect a number of them that you find useful either for their production quality, star power, or thematic choices, etc. Choose a version (using whatever criteria you determine) as your 'main' version. Identify for yourself any 'key scenes' that you find most important for your class. Provide any context or pre-discussion for the play. Begin viewing your main *Julius Caesar*. After viewing a 'key scene' on your main version, discuss the scene with your class identifying its key moments. After discussing the scene, view the same scene again using another version. With your students, compare and contrast the two versions of the scenes. You can repeat this process, of course, as often as you care to. This type of comparison helps students to free themselves from a 'there's only one right way to do this' mindset. Students can begin to imagine other versions of their own. You can also compare and contrast their imagined versions (i.e. What effect does changing Brutus' gender have on the play? If the rioting Romans were wearing masks over their mouths, how would that change our understanding? If Caesar was portrayed as an American President (fyi- he has been directly portrayed as presidents

Trump, Obama, Bush, Roosevelt as well as Mussolini, corporate CEOs, and generic fascist leaders) how would that change the tone and theme of the play?

### **7. Key Scenes Only**

As much as Calpurnia, Lucius, and other characters are rich facets of the play, their scenes may impede your students' engagement. Streamlining the play allows for a more succinct, albeit, a much more narrow, story line to follow. Summarizing an act with a few minutes of your own prose allows the class more time to delve into 'key scenes'. Not mentioning characters or events allows a more focused discussion on what remains. I would add that summarizing events does not free you the teacher from the necessity of dramatically engaging your students. Your summary must serve as an engagingly dramatic shortcut to the next 'key scene'. When summaries are devoid of engagement, they lose their function to convey the story.