

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

The Tragedy of Julius Caesar, Day 1



Key Paragraph, p. 15

“Cassius realizes Brutus is worried about Caesar’s growing power and tries to get Brutus to commit himself to opposing Caesar. Cassius is jealous of Caesar” (p. 15).

Writing Prompt

Jealousy can sometimes interfere with an individual doing the right thing. In the above paragraph, Cassius is trying to get people on his side. He is doing this out of jealousy, not because Caesar is doing something wrong.

In a paragraph, explain how jealousy interferes with an individual genuinely acting responsible. Use at least one example of jealousy from *Julius Caesar*. Remember to include a topic sentence, body, and closing sentence in your paragraph.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

The Tragedy of Julius Caesar, Day 2



Key Paragraph, p. 20

“When Brutus’ body is discovered, Antony calls him ‘the noblest Roman of them all’ because only Brutus acted for the good of the state alone, not from personal motives. They take his body for honorable burial” (p. 20).

Writing Prompt

Brutus believed he was doing the responsible thing when he murdered Julius Caesar. Even Antony acknowledged Brutus’ good intentions in the end. However, should good intentions excuse bad behavior?

Pretend you are an enemy of Brutus. **Write a paragraph-long speech in which you refute Antony’s assertion that Brutus acted nobly. What other choices could Brutus have made? Did Brutus make responsible decisions throughout the conspiracy? Did he use a framework for ethical decision-making?**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

The Tragedy of Julius Caesar, Day 3



Key Paragraph

"Hail, Caesar. Hail Caesar."

Writing Prompt

The director of this film version chooses to begin the story with a recap of Caesar's exploits that happen before Act I. He begins by showing dead, decaying soldiers on the battlefield. The last words we hear are "Hail, Caesar," as if they are spoken by a dying man.

Knowing what you know now about Julius Caesar, do you think he was a good leader? **Write a paragraph explaining the irony expressed in the words "Hail, Caesar," as spoken by a dying man. How are the words different when screamed by the adoring crowd in Rome?**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

The Tragedy of Julius Caesar, Day 4



Key Paragraph, p. 15

"He is a dreamer. Let us leave him. Pass" (p. 15).

Writing Prompt

Caesar chooses to disregard the Soothsayer's warning. He does not question the man about what he knows, nor does he show any kind of fear. He decides that the man is crazy or deranged, and ignores him completely.

If a stranger came up to you and warned you that your life was in danger, what would you do? **Write a dialogue between you and a stranger who gives you a dire warning. Be specific and descriptive. What details does the stranger have? What do you say back to the stranger? Did you learn anything from the story of Julius Caesar?**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

The Tragedy of Julius Caesar, Day 5



Key Paragraph, p. 17

“No, Cassius, for the eye sees not itself
But by reflection, by some other things” (p. 17).

Writing Prompt

When Cassius asks Brutus if he can see his own face, Brutus responds with the above. In life, we are often unable to see ourselves, and rely on the opinions of others to help us analyze our thoughts and feelings.

In a paragraph, analyze how Brutus is *really* feeling and thinking while he is talking to Cassius. What is Brutus not saying? What internal conflict is he working out at this moment? Why is Brutus so worried about Caesar receiving a crown? Use your Open Mind Portrait from today to write the internal dialogue Brutus is having with himself.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

The Tragedy of Julius Caesar, Day 6



Key Paragraph, p. 25

“Let me have men about me that are fat,
Sleek-headed men, and such as sleep a-nights.
Yond Cassius has a lean and hungry look.
He thinks too much. Such men are dangerous” (p. 25).

Writing Prompt

Though he ignored the Soothsayer’s warning, Caesar instinctually distrusts Cassius. Think about what Caesar means by the phrase “lean and dangerous.” Are there any people in your life who are “lean and dangerous?”

Caesar doesn’t mean that Cassius is *literally* thin and hungry. What kind of person is Cassius, according to Caesar? **Write a paragraph explaining the metaphor Caesar uses to describe Cassius. What is Cassius “hungry” for?**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

The Tragedy of Julius Caesar, Day 7



Key Paragraph, p. 41

“What trash is Rome,
What rubbish, and what offal when it serves
For the base matter to illuminate
So vile a thing as Caesar!” (p. 41).

Writing Prompt

To make his point, and to “stir up” his friends, Cassius uses strong words like the ones above to describe the decay of Rome. As the conspiracy progresses, he uses stronger language to convince his friends that their home is being ruined because of Caesar. As a result, they begin to lean to Cassius’ side, without hearing much counterargument.

What if you were there, trying to convince the same men to take Caesar’s side?

Write a short speech in which you point out how Caesar is *improving* Rome. Use figurative language to make your point. How is Rome more wonderful, more beautiful, and stronger as a result of Caesar’s influence?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

The Tragedy of Julius Caesar, Day 8



Key Paragraph, p. 61

"We all stand up against the spirit of Caesar,
And in the spirit of men there is no blood.
O, that we then could come by Caesar's spirit
And not dismember Caesar!" (p. 61).

Writing Prompt

Brutus' internal conflict is apparent in the words above. He believes that he is doing the responsible thing – what is right for his country and his fellow citizens – but regrets that Caesar must be murdered. If Brutus were a 21st century man, how would he express these feelings?

As Brutus, rewrite the key paragraph in modern day language. What does he mean by "Caesar's spirit?" What is his true goal? What problem is Brutus trying to solve by participating in the conspiracy?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

The Tragedy of Julius Caesar, Day 9



Key Paragraph, p. 69

"I should not need, if you were gentle Brutus.
Within the bond of marriage, tell me, Brutus,
Is it excepted I should know on secrets
That appertain to you? Am I your self
But, as it were, in sort or limitation,
To keep with you at meals, comfort your bed,
And talk to you sometimes?" (p. 69).

Writing Prompt

In her plea, Portia makes a strong argument that husbands and wives should tell each other everything. She believes that a husband and wife should be like one person. In her anger with Brutus, she even goes so far as to say he is treating her like a harlot, rather than like a wife.

Do you agree with Portia? Should husbands and wives share everything? **Write a persuasive paragraph in which you convince the reader that Portia is correct, or that Portia is wrong. Try to use at least one quote from today's reading to support or refute your argument.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

The Tragedy of Julius Caesar, Day 10



Key Paragraph, p. 77

“Cowards die many times before their deaths;
The valiant never taste of death but once” (p. 77).

Writing Prompt

Calphurnia begs her husband, for his own safety, to remain at home on the ides of March. Caesar makes the above statement as part of his response to her. He uses figurative, not literal, language to make his point.

Write a paragraph explaining what Caesar means by the above statement. How would Caesar define cowardice? How would he define valor? Which category do you think he himself falls into? Would a responsible person invite death, knowing it would hurt his family and friends?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

The Tragedy of Julius Caesar, Day 11



Key Paragraph, p. 99

“Et tu, Bruté? – Then fall, Caesar” (p. 99).

Writing Prompt

Legend has it that Caesar’s last words were a question to Brutus regarding his involvement in the plot. Shakespeare exploits this legend with his famous line *“Et tu, Bruté?”* In Latin, this means simply, *“And you, Brutus?”* In his last moments, Caesar realizes that the person he trusted most has betrayed him. He is shocked by this revelation, and his death is more bitter because of it. Here, Shakespeare implies that Caesar has a moment in which the motive behind his murder is clear.

Now is your chance to rewrite history. Imagine that Brutus had spoken directly to his friend Caesar about his concerns, rather than commiserate with the conspirators.

Write a dialogue between Caesar and Brutus in which Brutus and Caesar talk about their problem. How would Brutus communicate his worries without insulting Caesar? How do you think Caesar would respond? Could they come to a peaceful resolution?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

The Tragedy of Julius Caesar, Day 12



Key Paragraph, p. 107

“O Antony, beg not your death of us!
Though now we must appear bloody and cruel,
As by our hands and this our present act
You see we do, yet see you but our hands
And this the bleeding business they have done.
Our hearts you see not; they are pitiful;
And pity to the general wrong of Rome
(As fire drives out fire, so pity pity)
Hath done this deed on Caesar” (p. 107).

Writing Prompt

Brutus tries to explain to Antony that the conspirators acted out of love for Rome, and that they bear no complaint or malice toward Antony. He attempts to remove emotion from the killing by referring to it as a “business” rather than a murder. In short, Brutus justifies murder by saying it was a necessary act to protect his country. In both Caesar’s and Shakespeare’s times, the death sentence was almost universally accepted as a punishment for crime. Brutus would argue that Caesar had to be killed because of his crimes against Rome.

In many nations, as well as several U.S. states, the death penalty is now illegal. Do you believe that any criminal should be put to death? Write a paragraph in which you argue either for or against the death penalty. Try to use at least one example from *Julius Caesar* to back up your claim. Be sure to give at least one reason for your opinion, and support it with facts. Appeal to the emotion of your reader.

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

The Tragedy of Julius Caesar, Day 13



Key Paragraph, p. 113

"A curse shall light upon the limbs of men;
Domestic fury and fierce civil strife
Shall cumber all the parts of Italy;
...And Caesar's spirit, ranging for revenge...
With Ate by his side come hot from hell,
Shall in these confines with a monarch's voice
Cry "Havoc!" and let slip the dogs of war,
That this foul deed shall smell above the earth
With carrion men groaning for burial" (p. 113).

Writing Prompt

While Brutus acted out of conscience, Antony is clearly to planning to act out of revenge. Clearly, he is planning for many to die on a battlefield to avenge Caesar's death. In this case, when one person is doing what he believes is best for everyone, and the other is doing what satisfies his own personal feeling, who is the responsible party?

Write a paragraph in which you, as a friend of Antony, try to convince him to what is best for everyone in Rome – in other words, to act responsibly. What will be gained by more death and destruction? How could Antony honor Caesar's memory in a positive way? What is truly best for Rome and her people?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

The Tragedy of Julius Caesar, Day 14



Key Paragraph, p. 117

“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 freemen? As Caesar loved me, I weep for him. As he was fortunate, I rejoice at it. As he was valiant, I honor him. But, as he was ambitious, I slew him” (p. 117).

Writing Prompt

Brutus tells the plebeians of Rome that he killed Caesar to protect their freedom. After he gives this speech, they adore Brutus as much as they admired Caesar, and want to shower glory upon him. What was most important to them: political stability and safety, or personal freedom?

In a paragraph, explain what Brutus’ speech reveals about the values of Roman citizens, and how they compare to those of the British during Shakespeare’s time. Shakespeare creates the character of Brutus to be sympathetic to audiences in the 16th Century. What was happening politically in the world during Shakespeare’s time? How is that related to Rome, and to our own American history? Why do we find ourselves liking Shakespeare’s version of Brutus despite the murder he committed?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

The Tragedy of Julius Caesar, Day 15



Key Paragraph, p. 129

“For Brutus, as you know, was Caesar’s angel.
Judge, O you gods, how dearly Caesar loved him!
This was the most unkindest cut of all.
Ingratitude, more strong than traitors’ arms,
Quite vanquished him” (p. 129).

Writing Prompt

Antony’s speech is quite different from Brutus, with a very different result. While Brutus’ goal was to explain, Antony clearly had a different goal in mind. Which speech was more persuasive, and why was it more effective?

In a paragraph, explain which speech you believe was more persuasive – Brutus’ or Antony’s. Give at least three pieces of evidence that support your argument. What role did rhetorical devices play in making this speech successful?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

The Tragedy of Julius Caesar, Day 16



Key Paragraph, p. 141

"This is a slight, unmeritable man,
Meet to be sent on errands. Is it fit,
The threefold world divided, he should stand
One of the three to share it?" (p. 141).

Writing Prompt

Though Antony wants Lepidus' help in the fight that is to come, he does not respect Lepidus enough to share a leadership role with him. Antony insults Lepidus behind his back, and even compares him to a horse or other beast of burden.

Pretend you are a friend of Lepidus' who just overheard Antony's comments.

Write Lepidus a note warning him of Antony's true opinion of him. What should Lepidus do with this knowledge? What do you, Lepidus' friend, think of Antony's character? Is Antony a responsible person who you would want as an ally? Do you think this alliance will work out for Lepidus?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

The Tragedy of Julius Caesar, Day 17



Key Paragraph, p. 167

“We, at the height, are ready to decline.
There is a tide in the affairs of men
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;
Omitted, all the voyage of their life
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.
On such a full sea are we now afloat,
And we must take the current when it serves
Or lose our ventures” (p. 167).

Writing Prompt

As he tries to persuade the generals to march to Philippi, Brutus compares the lives of men to ships on the sea. Shakespeare often makes use of figurative language to make his characters' points, as in the example above.

In a paragraph, explain Brutus' metaphor above in greater detail. Do you agree with him that “There is a tide in the affairs of men?” By his definition, how must responsible people act when faced with difficult choices? What is Shakespeare foreshadowing with this particular speech?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

The Tragedy of Julius Caesar, Day 18



Key Paragraph, p. 173

"Thy evil spirit, Brutus.

... To tell thee thou shalt see me at Philippi" (p. 173).

Writing Prompt

Shakespeare uses ghosts in many of his plays. Typically, they torment the living into taking some kind of action. In this case, Brutus' vision of Caesar's ghost causes him to change the battle plan, and send Cassius' forces ahead of his own.

Even if you did not know the outcome of the story, what would the ghost foreshadow? **Write a paragraph detailing how Shakespeare develops and foreshadows the end to his tragedy. What hints, other than the ghost, has the author dropped throughout the story? How do we know that Brutus' battle will end badly, even before it begins?**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

The Tragedy of Julius Caesar, Day 19



Key Paragraph, p. 181

BRUTUS

Good words are better than bad strokes, Octavius.

ANTONY

In your bad strokes, Brutus, you give good words.

Witness the hole you made in Caesar's heart,

Crying "Long live, hail, Caesar!"(p. 181).

Writing Prompt

Even though both sides know there will be a battle, Brutus tries to speak rationally to Antony and Octavius to avoid the fight. Antony immediately calls Brutus on the hypocrisy of his words, pointing out that he used violence against Caesar. Thinking back on all the events of the play, how might Brutus' fate have change if he heeded his own advice, and used words instead of violence?

Pretend you could go back in time with the knowledge you have now about the outcome of Caesar's murder. **Write a paragraph in which you persuade Brutus to find an alternative to killing Caesar. Be sure to mention the terrible things that have happened since Caesar's death – the killing of senators and Cinna, the suicide of Portia, etc. What other actions could he have taken? Use Brutus' own belief that words can be a powerful tool as part of your persuasion.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

The Tragedy of Julius Caesar, Day 20



Key Paragraph, p. 197

“O Julius Caesar, thou art might yet;
Thy spirit walks abroad and turns our swords
In our own proper entrails” (p. 197).

Writing Prompt

Brutus speaks to the memory of Caesar, acknowledging that the conspirators' plan has gone awry with the death of Cassius. Even in the midst of the battlefield, his mind is on Caesar's power and force of personality.

If Caesar's ghost were in Philippi with Brutus, what would it say to him? This is your chance to be Shakespeare! **Write a dialogue between Brutus and Julius Caesar's ghost as Brutus stands over the body of Cassius. Would Caesar's ghost make another dire prediction? Would it give Brutus advice? Would the ghost say anything about Cassius? Your dialogue should be at least ten lines long, and should be written in the Shakespearean style.**

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

The Tragedy of Julius Caesar, Day 21



Key Paragraph, p. 209

"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 mixed in him that nature might stand up
And say to all the world "This was a man" (p. 209).

Writing Prompt

Caesar won great battles, but was murdered by his own Senate. Brutus acted out of fear of a dictator, but his actions led to the rise of Rome's first emperor. Antony was a great leader in battle, but was eventually betrayed by his ally Octavius. Which of these men, full of greatness and burdened by faults, was the best leader?

Write a paragraph with a strong thesis statement asserting which character in *Julius Caesar* was the best, most responsible leader. Be sure to mention your criteria for a great leader. How does your character represent those criteria? Why was he a greater leader than the other men in the story?

Character Based Literacy Program Writing Prompt

The Tragedy of Julius Caesar, Final Writing Prompt



Final Writing Product:

Caesar, Antony, Brutus, and Cassius were all leaders of Rome. Each had a unique style of leadership, and each was driven by a different motive. Throughout our study of *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar*, we have repeatedly asked ourselves the question: what are the qualities of a responsible leader?

For your final writing assignment, you will write and perform a speech that explains to your audience which character in *Julius Caesar* was the best, most responsible leader. Of course, your speech will include your definition of a responsible leader, and give at least three examples of how your character exhibited the qualities of a responsible leader.