Character Explorer:

Marc Antony from *Julius Caesar*

Who is Marc Antony?

Marcus Antonius was a Roman general and politician who lived from 83-30 BCE. According to the early historian Plutarch, Antony spent his teenage years along with his brothers and friends, engaging in gambling, drinking, and scandalous love affairs. Antony began his military career in his mid-twenties. As he moved up through the ranks, he began cultivating political relationships, including one with Julius Caesar. Antony eventually became Caesar's top general and leading supporter. After Caesar was assassinated, Antony joined Caesar's great-nephew and adopted heir, Octavius and a Roman general named Lepidus in forming a triumvirate to share power. At the battle of Philippi, they defeated Brutus, Cassius, and the other senators who killed Caesar. This is where Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* ends. Shakespeare wrote another play, *Antony & Cleopatra*, which portrays the eventual breakdown of this alliance in the context of an epic love story.

What happens with Marc Antony in *Julius Caesar*

At the beginning of the play, Marc Antony prepares to run through the streets of Rome as part of the festival of Lupercal, an annual rite in mid-February thought to purify the city and promote health and fertility. A senator named Casca reports what happens afterwards: before a large crowd, Antony offered Caesar a crown, which Caesar refused. This inspired cheers in the crowd. Antony offered the crown to Caesar three times, and each time Caesar refused it and the crowd cheered.

The next mention of Antony is in the conspirators' discussion of their plan to assassinate Caesar. Some of the senators think they should kill Antony as well, but Brutus convinces them that without Caesar, Antony is harmless. However, as part of the plan, one of the senators will lead Antony away from Caesar before the assassination.

After Caesar is killed, Antony is unsure what to expect from the assassins. Antony expresses tentative friendship and asks them to explain their actions. Antony also requests to speak at Caesar's funeral. Cassius has misgivings, fearing that Antony could move the people to anger over Caesar's death. Brutus assures Cassius that it will be fine. However, Brutus has underestimated Antony, whose oration at the funeral is so moving and so affecting that the people riot, swearing to kill all the conspirators and burn down their houses. Antony acknowledges that this was the plan all along. The rioting is so extreme that the angry mob murders a poet, simply for having the same name as one of the conspirators.

When Antony is joined by Octavius and Lepidus, they make lists of people condemned to death, bargaining with one another as they "prick them down". We begin to see tension in the relationship of the three new leaders, but Antony and Octavius prepare their armies to fight those of Cassius and Brutus. At the first battle at Philippi, Antony defeats Cassius, who dies by suicide without learning that Brutus had defeated Octavius. In the second battle, Brutus is defeated and also dies by suicide. Antony's final words in the play honour Brutus as 'the noblest Roman of them all'.

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Things others say about Marc Antony

The ways Antony is talked about can illuminate aspects of the character.

I do lack some part Of that quick spirit that is in Antony.	We shall find of him A shrewd contriver.
Antony is but a limb of Caesar.	See! Antony, that revels long o' nights, Is notwithstanding up.
Know you how much the people may be moved By that which he will utter?	Poor soul! his eyes are red as fire with weeping.
There's not a nobler man in Rome than Antony.	We'll hear him, we'll follow him, we'll die with him.

Some things Marc Antony says throughout the play

Lines that a character speaks can reveal details about their personality and relationships with other characters. The lines below are listed in the order they appear in the play.

1. I shall remember:
   When Caesar says 'do this,' it is perform'd.

2. Live a thousand years,
   I shall not find myself so apt to die:
   No place will please me so, no mean of death,
   As here by Caesar, and by you cut off,
   The choice and master spirits of this age.

3. O, pardon me, thou bleeding piece of earth,
   That I am meek and gentle with these butchers!

4. Cry ‘Havoc’, and let slip the dogs of war.

5. Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears.

6. Bear with me;
   My heart is in the coffin there with Caesar,
   And I must pause till it come back to me.

7. This was the most unkindest cut of all;
   For when the noble Caesar saw him stab,
   Ingratitude, more strong than traitors' arms,
   Quite vanquish'd him: then burst his mighty heart.

8. Good friends, sweet friends, let me not stir you up
   To such a sudden flood of mutiny.

9. I have neither wit, nor words, nor worth,
   Action, nor utterance, nor the power of speech,
   To stir men's blood: I only speak right on.

10. Now let it work. Mischief, thou art afoot,
    Take thou what course thou wilt!

11. He shall not live; look, with a spot I damn him.

12. His life was gentle, and the elements
    So mix'd in him that Nature might stand up
    And say to all the world 'This was a man!'

Challenging assumptions about Marc Antony

A lot of people think of Antony as a hero. While there is a lot to admire in Antony's character, people have often come to this conclusion having read only excerpts from Shakespeare's play, considering famous speeches out of context. One of the standard pieces considered this way is Antony's funeral oration that begins with "Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears…" This is a masterful piece of persuasive speech, in which both Antony's and Shakespeare's rhetorical prowess is on full display.

Antony skillfully sways the crowd using logos (an appeal to reason), ethos (an appeal based on shared values), and pathos (an appeal to emotions). Antony deftly seems to praise Brutus and the other conspirators while undermining their case for killing Caesar. With a strategic use of rhetorical figures, Antony modulates and sequences layers of argument to influence the crowd and engineer their response.

Taking the speech out of context deprives the reader or audience member of vital information about Antony's motivations and character. After the crowd has been whipped into a violent, riotous frenzy, Antony says,

> Now let it work. Mischief, thou art afoot.
> Take thou what course thou wilt.

Taking the speech out of context also ignores what happens in the following two scenes. First, the crowd murders Cinna the Poet, simply for having the same name as a conspirator, not even stopping once they know the poet was a friend of Caesar's and had nothing to do with his assassination. Did Antony realize this might be the course that mischief would take? The next scene shows Antony, Lepidus, and Octavius going over a list of people they've decided to execute, bargaining with one another over who is marked for death. In this scene Antony says,

> These many then shall die; their names are prick'd…
> …He shall not live; look, with a spot I damn him.

It's difficult to know what to think about a character when we simply consider one of their speeches out of context. When we explore more of the play, we can see that Shakespeare presents characters in all their complexity, leaving it to us to decide if we find them admirable.

What do you think?

- What is your impression of Antony in the early scenes of the play? How do other characters describe Antony? Is this someone you might want as a friend?
- Think about Antony's encounter with the conspirators after Caesar's assassination. Can you imagine being in Antony's position? Would you have reacted differently?
- If you were in the crowd listening to Antony's funeral oration, how do you imagine you'd react? What do you find persuasive? What do you find suspect?

Make It Your Own

Now it's your turn! Read through the information about Marc Antony on the previous pages. Then, using those words, lines, and the story, choose activities from the list below to explore your own interpretations and collaborate with Shakespeare. You can also consult the full play, if you like. You can read it for free online thanks to the Folger Shakespeare Library.

MOVE

How would your Antony move? How would you express the thoughts with your body? How could you use your voice and/or body to create this character? Based on what you know about Antony, create your own movement-based interpretation of the text.

Create a sculpture or statue using your body to express what Antony's lines mean to you. Create a gesture or sculpture for each line. You could also speak the line as you hold each pose. Try it many different ways and notice how each version feels.

WRITE

Create a poem, story, or monologue inspired by the lines that describe Antony. Then, create another piece using the lines that Antony speaks. How are the two different? What if you created a piece that was a dialogue between the two perspectives?

LISTEN

What would your Antony soundtrack be? What types of instruments, ambient sounds, or music would accompany your Antony? Make an Antony playlist, or create a soundscape: if you like, you could include recordings of the descriptive words and/or Antony's lines.

MAKE

Create a costume design. What would your Antony wear? How does this character spend their time? How do they move? What do they want others to think about them? Where does this character live? What's the climate like? What if the story were moved to a different setting? How does changing the setting to a different time or place change what you imagine?

Create an art project inspired by the words used to describe Antony and by the lines that Antony speaks.

Reflect on Your Creations

- What discoveries did you make as you explored the text?
- Why did you make the creative choices that you made?
- What did you learn about Antony? About the play? About yourself?

bard EDUCATION