Who's Who
in
William Shakespeare's
Julius Caesar

When Shakespeare wrote Julius Caesar, he followed historical sources, mainly Sir Thomas North's translation of Plutarch's Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans. As a result, his play has more than 40 characters, some of whom appear only briefly. When producing the play, many theatre companies eliminate characters or combine them to simplify the story and provide more meaningful throughlines for fewer characters. This practice tells a story that is not historically accurate, but more dramatically compelling. The following descriptions will share information about the historical figures and about Shakespeare's portrayal of them.

Romans Involved in the Conspiracy:

Julius Caesar (the target of the conspiracy) is often considered one of the most successful military strategists who ever lived, but in this play we see only the end of Caesar's life. Having had great military success, Caesar has become extremely powerful and has been named 'Dictator for Life'. Many fear that Caesar wants to become King, a great threat to the current government of the Republic of Rome. Caesar's assassination was a great turning point in the history of western civilization. Later in the play, Caesar makes an appearance as a Ghost.

Marcus **Brutus** fought with Pompey against Caesar in the civil war, but Caesar pardoned him. There were rumours of a love affair between Caesar and Brutus's mother, with suggestions that Caesar may have been Brutus's biological father. However, many scholars discount this. In Shakespeare's play Brutus is often described by others a 'noble'. Brutus speaks more than any other character in the play.

Portia is married to Brutus. The historical Portia was the daughter of the famous Cato the Younger, renowned for his strict morality and hostility towards Caesar. In Shakespeare's play, Portia confronts Brutus and demands to know about the plot. She later dies by suicide.

Caius **Cassius** is considered the main instigator in the plot to assassinate Caesar. Shakespeare portrays Cassius and Brutus as close friends.

Casca is described in Shakespeare's historical source as the first to stab Caesar, but the character in the play is largely Shakespeare's invention. Casca is described by others as being 'blunt', meaning rude.

Decius Brutus successfully persuades Caesar to ignore Calpurnia's fears and go to the Senate house.

Cinna is a conspirator who seems to like to take charge.

Caius Ligarius is another conspirator. In Shakespeare's play, Caius Ligarius almost misses the assassination because of illness, but inspired by knowledge of the plot, recovers.

Trebonius and **Metellus Cimber** also take part in the conspiracy.

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Romans Not Involved in the Conspiracy:

Calpurnia is Caesar's spouse who has terrible dreams the night before the assassination. Interpreting these and other events as omens representing danger to Caesar, Calpurnia is almost successful in persuading Caesar to stay home.

Mark **Antony** (Marcus Antonius) is deeply loyal to Caesar. Shakespeare portrays Antony as an athlete as well as an orator, and has Caesar mention that Antony "revels long a-nights". Shakespeare wrote another tragedy featuring this character in later years, *Antony & Cleopatra*.

Cicero was a Roman statesman, lawyer, scholar, philosopher, orator, and writer. While one of the most famous of all ancient Romans, Cicero has quite a small part in Shakespeare's play. However, Cicero is referred to often, including the news that he was put to death in the aftermath of Caesar's assassination.

Popilius is a senator who is not part of the conspiracy but seems to know about it.

Octavius Caesar is great-nephew and adopted heir of Caesar. Part of the triumvirate that shared power in the aftermath of Caesar's assassination, Octavius went on to dominate when the triumvirate later dissolved. These events are portrayed in Shakespeare's *Antony & Cleopatra*. Octavius later became the first Roman emperor, Augustus Caesar.

Lepidus is a general who briefly shares power with Antony and Octavius as part of the triumvirate.

Flavius and **Marullus** are elected officials called Tribunes. They begin Shakespeare's play by scolding the crowd for cheering for Caesar.

A **Soothsayer** warns Caesar about the "Ides of March" (the day in the Roman calendar that is equivalent to March 15).

Artemidorus tries to warn Caesar of the plot.

Lucius is Brutus's young servant who often falls asleep. There are other **servants** and **messengers**.

Lucilius, **Titinius**, **Messala**, **Young Cato**, and **Strato** are all supporters of Brutus and Cassius and officers in their armies. **Varrus**, **Claudio**, **Clitus**, **Dardanius**, and **Volumnius** are all soldiers.

Pindarus is a servant of Cassius.

The **Crowd** is made up of the people of Rome. They are important characters at various points in the play, especially as they hear Brutus and Antony speak at Caesar's funeral.

A **Carpenter** and a **Cobbler** appear in the first scene, cheering for Caesar.

Cinna the Poet is torn apart by an angry mob, simply for sharing a name with a conspirator.

Questions for you to consider

- Which characters are most interesting to you? Who do you want to know more about? Why?
- How would you distinguish between the characters involved in the plot and those loyal to Caesar? What might the characters wear? How is each group distinct, and yet part of the same play?
- As you continue to learn about the characters, think about how you might cast actors to play them. You could take a realistic approach, casting people you know. Or you could take a fantasy approach and include famous people. Who would your dream cast be?

For an overview of what these characters experience in the play, please see our Discovery Zone resource, What Happens in *Julius Caesar.*