

AN

INTRODUCTION

TO

USING

THEATRE-BASED APPROACHES

Aims

To develop knowledge and understanding of theatre-based approaches to Shakespeare and how to apply them in the classroom. To further explore the themes of leadership and power in **Julius Caesar** through active theatre-based approaches.

Curriculum links

English, Personal, Social and Health Education, Drama, Citizenship.

Citizenship skills and outlooks

Communicating, collaborating, creative thinking, developing empathy.

Resources required

Large open space for practical work, copies of scene and speech extracts, character profiles, text scraps and the story in 20 minutes. You can find the speeches in this section and the additional materials online at <https://schoolsonline.britishcouncil.org/classroom-resources/list/shakespeare-lives>



INTRODUCTION

Throughout the **Shakespeare Lives** schools' pack you will have found many ideas and approaches that are inspired by the way actors and directors work at the Royal Shakespeare Company. If you are new to theatre-based approaches or want to use more of these kinds of techniques to explore Shakespeare's plays, then the following sequence is designed for you.

The RSC see direct parallels between teaching and learning in the classroom and the way that plays are developed in the theatre. The process of rehearsing a play is collaborative. As a group, the actors and director will make choices about the interpretation of plot, characters, themes and language of the play. They also explore the key themes and dilemmas that are present in the text.

The following sequence of work offers a detailed exploration of the theme of leadership and power for older pupils, through close study of **Julius Caesar**. However, the activities and ideas can be applied to other plays and any of the key themes explored throughout this pack. As in the rehearsal rooms, the work in this section focuses on:

- **Establishing the world.**
- **Telling the story.**
- **Discovering the characters.**
- **Exploring the language.**

This section also acts as a glossary for all the activity terms in the theme sections. So if you are unsure how any of them work you can find them explained fully here.



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1 ESTABLISHING THE WORLD OF THE PLAY

WARM UP ACTIVITIES

! OVERVIEW

In this activity pupils will get a sense of what it feels like to live with a secret, to think about the consequences of acting against a ruler and what might drive a person to do that.

When an RSC acting company starts exploring a key theme in Shakespeare's work, it's important for them to establish the world in which a story is taking place.

As a theatre company, the RSC sees the 'world' of the play as being different from the setting. For example, the setting of **Julius Caesar** is Rome, but the world of the play is a society where people are questioning the right of their ruler to govern and exploring their own rights as citizens.

The following activities focus on the world of **Julius Caesar**, looking specifically at different styles of leadership and how these might affect the people who are ruled in that way.

- Ask pupils to spread themselves out. Invite them to imagine that they live in a place where they are ruled by a leader they want to remove and are planning a way to get rid of him.
- To do this they have to work with a group of other conspirators, in secret. Ask them to walk around the space, as though they were plotting this act.
- Then ask pupils to decide on a number, either 1, 2 or 3, and keep it secret.
- Explain that they should continue walking around the space. When you clap your hands they need to find another person and swap numbers, in a conspiratorial whisper.



- Explain to pupils that the number they hear will change how they react to that other person:
 - 1s will tap 2s on the shoulder.
 - 2s will tap 3s on the shoulder.
 - 3s will tap 1s on the shoulder.
- Pupils who are tapped on the shoulder should die dramatically on the floor. If they meet someone with the same number they should walk around together.
- When there are only a few players left standing reflect with them on how it made them feel not knowing what number each person they met would whisper and how they felt revealing their own. How do they think it would feel to be a conspirator who was actively trying to hurt a powerful leader? What could drive you to that point? Why might you dislike a leader that much?

This warm up activity, introducing the theme of lies and conspiracy, can be adapted to introduce the world of other plays you are studying. In **Romeo and Juliet, for example, you could use this to look at the Montagues and Capulets.**

IMAGING

! OVERVIEW

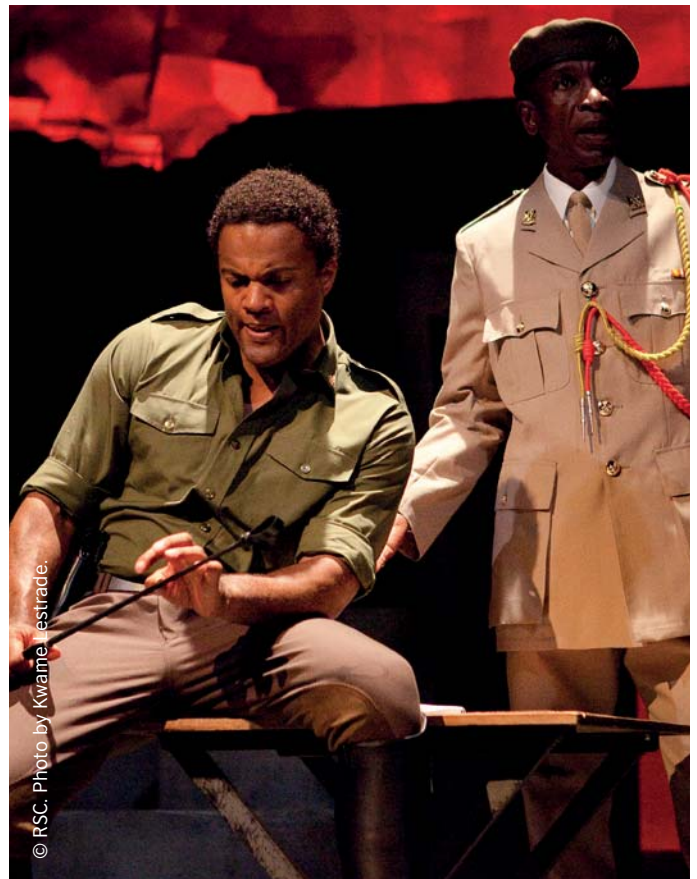
In this activity pupils will be introduced to different styles of leadership and begin to consider which is more effective as well as beginning to think about the style of leadership seen in *Julius Caesar*.

Organise pupils into small groups of five or six and invite them to create a still image of each of the following:

- a politician trying to win votes.
 - people plotting to overthrow a leader.
 - a leader who rules by force.
 - people ruling a country together.
- Invite pupils to share their images with the rest of the group and reflect on their choices.
- Discuss the similarities and differences the pupils notice in the ways they have presented people ruling together with someone ruling by force. Who do they expect to rule by force? Is this more likely to be an heir or someone who is chosen (elected) to be a ruler or leader?
- Explain to pupils that at the start of the play, Julius Caesar is the very powerful ruler of Rome. Rome has become famous as a democracy, which was governed mainly by a group of people known as the Senate, but Julius Caesar was not elected or chosen by his people and he ruled more like a king. What are the advantages and disadvantages of this?

! OVERVIEW

This imaging activity can be used to introduce key ideas and concepts in any play you are studying. For example, in *Macbeth* – to explore the relationship between Macbeth and Banquo – you could start with images of two friends sharing a secret, the two friends celebrating and then two friends who don't trust each other anymore. It is also a great way to introduce lines from the text. In *Romeo and Juliet*, for example, you could challenge pupils to think about creating a family feud or a pair of 'star-crossed lovers'.



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2 TELLING THE STORY

Once an acting company have an understanding of the worlds in which a story is taking place, it is important for them to gain a collective understanding of what happens in the text itself. The director will usually spend the first part of the rehearsal process focusing on this.

The following activities will introduce pupils to the opening scene of **Julius Caesar** and the story as a whole. They will be able to identify moments in the play where opinions about Julius Caesar as a leader change and what makes this happen. Do they agree or disagree that Caesar had a right to rule his people? Do they agree with the actions of the conspirators in removing him?

SOUNDSCAPE

! OVERVIEW

In this activity pupils will get the chance to imagine the attitudes of the ordinary citizens of Rome and their thoughts about their ruler. This may be a good opportunity to ask pupils to think about whether the citizens care that Caesar wasn't picked by them. Do they think that the citizens would mind if Caesar was appointed as a king?

Before exploring the overarching story of a play it can be good to explore how the play opens, and how we are first introduced to the world of the play and its characters.

Ask pupils to sit in a circle and discuss the line:

We make holiday to see Caesar, and to rejoice in his triumph.

- Explain that this is from the opening scene. None of the main characters are there, as it opens with a cobbler and carpenter getting ready to celebrate.
- Invite pupils to think about the atmosphere in this opening scene. What are the key words in the line that tell us what is happening? What kind of place is Rome? How do these 'ordinary' men feel about Caesar?
- Encourage pupils to create the atmosphere of a party, where they are rejoicing in Caesar's triumph. Using the key words they have picked out, ask them to send the words across the circle, first as a stage whisper and then growing louder to lift the party mood, with more people joining in.
- Invite pupils to then introduce other sounds such as chanting, clapping, laughing, footsteps etc.
- Allow this soundscape to build and then ask pupils to gradually stop, reducing the noise.
- Select two pupils to play Flavius and Murellus who are like policeman in this scene. Give these pupils the following lines and ask them to interrupt the soundscape when they think they should.

Flavius Hence! Home you idle creatures, get you home! Is this a holiday?

Murellus You blocks, you stones, you worse than senseless things

- Explain that the citizens are stopped from celebrating by the officers of Rome. Ask the players how the citizens seem to feel about Caesar at the beginning of the play and how they feel about the authorities after being stopped?
- Ask pupils to think about why Shakespeare opens the play in this way, with these ordinary characters? Why might the reactions and feelings of Rome's citizens be important? What kind of leader is Caesar?

This soundscape activity can be used to explore the opening scene in any play you are studying. For example, in *Macbeth* you could start with the line 'when shall we three meet again/In thunder, lightning or in rain?' and build a soundscape which Banquo and Macbeth can interrupt with 'so fair and foul a day I have not seen'. In *Hamlet* or *The Tempest* it might be used to create Elsinore Castle or the storm.

THE STORY IN 20 MINUTES

! OVERVIEW

In this activity, pupils will get the chance to look at the whole play, exploring the key moments in the plot against Caesar. This may be a good opportunity to think about what responsibilities people have when they 'make' someone a ruler or leader.

- Organise pupils into small groups. Assign each group three or four of the short scenes in the **online resources**.
- Invite one pupil in each group to take on the role of a narrator, telling the story of their scene while the rest of the group act out what happens.
- Encourage groups to use the lines from the play and to include the characters mentioned in bold text.
- Allow each group time to rehearse their scenes before asking them to share them with the rest of the class, in the order they occur in the play.

- Reflect with pupils on why they think Brutus and Cassius took the risks they did? Why does Cassius encourage Brutus to join him in the conspiracy at the start and why do they think Brutus is convinced? What is he afraid of losing?
- You may want to explore the history of Rome with pupils at this point, asking them to research the history of the Republic or offering them information on how Rome was ruled before Caesar and why the Senate exists. Why might Brutus think that he has a responsibility to stop Caesar accepting a crown and becoming king? Who will become ruler after Caesar's murder? Do they have a right to rule any more than Caesar did?

If you know a play well, this storytelling activity can be used to introduce the plot in any play you are studying and is also a good way to include text from different points in the play. You can adapt the activity so that you explore the play in more stages or less stages.



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3 DISCOVERING THE CHARACTERS

Once you have an overview of the world of a play and a sense of the story, it can deepen understanding to look at the characters that inhabit those worlds and explore their motivations.

The following activities will help pupils look at the different characters in the play and their views on leadership.

SCULPTING

Organise pupils into pairs and provide each pair with a different character profile from the **online resources**.

! OVERVIEW

In this activity pupils will get the chance to think about the political situation in the world of Julius Caesar and how the characters relate to each other. This may be a good opportunity to ask pupils to consider what the differences are between a ruler who was 'born' to lead and one who has been 'made' a leader.

- Using the profiles, ask one pupil to direct the other and to sculpt their partner into a pose to show what their character is like.
- Challenge pupils to develop their sculptures by including the extracts they have been given, bringing their sculpture to life to deliver the line.
- Ask pupils to listen and watch carefully as each of the animated sculptures comes to life. Ask them to then move around the space and locate other characters they think their character would be likely to team up with. This will help pupils to start thinking about the political allegiances of each character and who they might be connected to.
- Reflect with pupils on what factions, or groups, they think there are. Who might be the main threats to Caesar? Where are the women in the play?

This **sculpting** activity can be used to introduce characters in any play you are studying. It can be adapted so that characters move into a single freeze frame. In **A Midsummer Night's Dream** for example, you might create three separate freeze frames, or photographs of the court of Athens, the mechanicals and the fairies. As these worlds cross over, you might want to challenge pupils to combine their photographs.

4 EXPLORING THE LANGUAGE

Shakespeare's plays were written to be performed rather than read and exploring the language in a practical way can open up meaning for young people. The RSC believes that the language of the play should provide the starting point for all the work around a production.

The following activities or **scene studies** will explore key moments in the play, as well as staging choices. Pupils will get the chance to explore Cassius's character by examining his soliloquy from **Act 1 Scene 2** and Brutus's choices. Begin by looking at Cassius's soliloquy. You might want to read it more than once in different ways; asking pupils to emphasise the consonants and hard sounds the first time and the sibilance and 's' sounds the second time. Who do they think Cassius is speaking to?



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SCENE STUDY: WHISPERED READING

! OVERVIEW

In this activity pupils will get the chance to explore Cassius's motives. This may be a good opportunity to think about why Cassius feels the need to lie to Brutus in order to get his support. Do they think there is a difference in one person challenging a ruler compared to a group?

- Organise pupils into groups of three and ask them to look at Cassius's soliloquy and translate each of the lines into modern English together, working out what Cassius is saying in each line.
 - **You may want to divide the lines between the groups to make this more manageable, agreeing on a whole class translation.**
- Ask one of the pupils in the group to sit on a chair and play Cassius. Then, ask the other two to stand on either side of Cassius. The pupil on the right should whisper Shakespeare's lines into Cassius's ear and the pupil on the left should then whisper their translation into the other ear. Ask the groups to rotate the roles until each of them has played Cassius.
- Reflect with pupils on what parts of the speech stood out for them.
- Invite pupils to stand in a circle and ask a volunteer to come into the middle. Encourage pupils, as a collective director, to suggest how Cassius might look and behave, inviting the volunteer to take on those character traits and behaviours and re-read the speech.
- Ask pupils to reflect on what motivates Cassius. Do they think he is honourable? Why does he think it's so important that he convince Brutus that Caesar wants to be a king? Did whispering the speech reveal anything? Is his dilemma something Cassius is proud of?

This exploration of a soliloquy can be used to explore speeches in any play you are studying. *Whispered reading* is a great way of looking at a soliloquy as it helps to think about what is happening in someone's head. For example, in *Othello*, Iago's soliloquies open up his motivations and move the plot forward.

Having looked at the story of the play, ask pupils to think about Brutus and his choices. Which do they think are the crucial, pivotal, moments for his character? Why are these moments so dramatic?

From these activities pupils will get the chance to think about staging and interpretation. This may be a good opportunity to think about why Portia is excluded from Brutus's secrets and why this frustrates her. In this play, it is a group of men who rise up against Caesar. Is this a good way to 'make' a new leader or should all groups in society be involved?

SCENE STUDY: BACK TO BACK READING

Arrange pupils into pairs and provide each pair with the edited copy of **Act 2 Scene 1** where Portia confronts Brutus about what he is considering doing.

- Invite pupils to read through the script standing back to back.
- Reflect with pupils on what the conversation feels like. How is Brutus feeling? What does Portia suspect?

SCENE STUDY: AS IF

- Encourage pupils to read the scene again, thinking about how the characters deliver the lines. Ask each pair to play the scene as if:
 - Portia is talking to Brutus like he's a small child.
 - Brutus is annoyed with Portia.
- Allow pupils to experiment with these interpretations, before sharing some of them with the class. Reflect on which interpretation felt more realistic. How do they think Brutus and Portia both feel in this scene? Why? Does it change?

These scene studies can be used to look at any duologue in the play you are studying, to gain a better understanding of relationships and think about the staging.

CHARACTER MOTIVATIONS

! OVERVIEW

In this activity pupils will get the chance to explore and question the motives of the conspirators, thinking not only about staging but also why characters act the way they do in the play. This may be a good opportunity to consider if it would have been different had Caesar been 'born' to lead. Do they think it makes a difference if power is inherited?

Ask pupils to think about which moments are the most pivotal in the play. Explain that they are going to focus on the assassination of Caesar.

- Organise pupils into a large circle, an object representing a dagger in the centre and nominate one pupil to represent Caesar and to kneel by the dagger.
- Provide each pupil in the circle with one of the text scraps in the resources and ask them to think about what reason they give for killing Caesar.
- Ask pupils to read their line and then lay it on the floor somewhere inside the circle. They should lay it close to Caesar if they think that their reason is rational and near the outside edge if they think it's less reasonable.
- Reflect with pupils on which characters seem to have the most reasonable motives and question why that might be.

IMAGING

- Divide the group into two halves. Explain that one half will be the actors/statues the others will be the directors/sculptors and that they are going to create a tableau of the assassination of Caesar.
- Assign each pupil a character and arrange them into groups with all of the characters represented. Each group should also have two directors.
- Invite the directors to move the characters one by one and place them into a scene showing the assassination of Caesar. Ask them to think about how they can convey each character's attitudes and feelings.
- Allow each group an opportunity to share their tableau with the rest of the class. Pupils should be able to question the directors about their choices.
- Encourage the directors to change things about their tableau while they are showing it, if their opinions change or they think they can make things clearer.

This activity can be used to explore pivotal moments or choices in any play you are studying. For example, in *Macbeth* you could use a dagger and explore how close or far away from it Macbeth is as he struggles with whether or not to kill Duncan.

CHORAL READING

! OVERVIEW

In this activity pupils will be able to look at the language used by the two speakers and compare these, as well as their arguments. This may be a good opportunity to consider why Mark Antony's argument for Caesar wins over the support of the public of Rome; do they think that he is right that Caesar should not have been murdered because he was 'ambitious'? Would it be different if he had not been murdered?

- Organise pupils into two groups. Give one group Mark Antony's speech and the other Brutus's speech. (If you have a small group then you could choose to all focus on Mark Antony's speech).
- Explain that these speeches are both delivered at Caesar's funeral. Both men attempt to convince the people of Rome that their view is correct.

PUNCTUATION SHIFT

- Invite the groups to read their speeches aloud while walking around the space as they read aloud, changing direction each time they reach a punctuation mark. Are there many changes in direction? What does it tell you about the state of the speaker?
- Challenge pupils to create a set of gestures or signs to represent each of the rhetorical features listed in the **online resources**. For example, they might punch the air when repetition is used.
- Invite pupils to read the text again, all together as a group in a **choral reading**, using their gestures alongside the speech. What does this show them about the speech?
- Ask one volunteer to stand on a chair in the centre of the group and read the whole speech. The rest of the group, acting as the crowd or mob, should then shout every time they think the speaker offers a clear argument.
- Repeat this for the other speech, so that pupils can compare Mark Antony with Brutus. Who did they cheer most? Who seemed most convincing?
- Discuss with pupils why they think Mark Antony succeeds in convincing the people. What does Mark Antony's speech do so successfully?

This activity can be used to explore text in any play you are studying. A punctuation shift, for example, will give pupils a feel for the pace and mindset of any character. In *Henry IV Part I*, for example, comparing Prince Hal's speech in *Act 1 Scene 2* and Hotspur's speech in *Act 2 Scene 3* using just this technique can give a real insight into how different they are; one being calm and collected and changing direction much less. **Choral reading can also be used to look at speeches in different texts.**

IMPROVISING IN CONTEXT

! OVERVIEW

In this activity pupils will be able to explore rhetorical devices further, as well as to consolidate what they have learned about the arguments for and against Caesar's murder. This may be a good opportunity for pupils to think about what the consequences might have been had Brutus and the conspirators done nothing. Is there a point at which people have a responsibility to step in and question a leader? Is this the same if they are born to lead or if they are made a leader?

- Ask two volunteers to play Tribunes and judge whether Caesar's death was justified, and who is most persuasive.
- Divide the rest of the class into three groups, A, B and C. Each group should be given a character to represent: Cassius, Brutus or Mark Antony.
- Explain that each group (A, B and C) needs to persuade the tribunal of their point of view using rhetorical techniques. Remind the students of the rules of ethos, logos and pathos in the **online resources**.
- Ask each group to choose one pupil to be the voice of the character. The other pupils in the group can whisper ideas and arguments to the speaker as they are talking. This shares the responsibility of the argument.
- Allow each group to present their case to the two Tribunes while they ask questions. You can begin the activity using the introduction in the **online resources**.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Cassius's speech Act 1 Scene 2 extract

Well, Brutus, thou art noble: yet I see
Thy honorable **mettle** may be **wrought**
From **that it is disposed**: therefore it is **meet**
That noble minds keep ever with **their likes**,
For **who** so firm that cannot be seduced?
Caesar doth **bear me hard**, but he loves Brutus.
If I were Brutus now and he were Cassius,
He should not humor me. I will this night,
In **several hands**, in at his windows throw,
As if they came from several citizens,
Writings all **tending** to the great opinion
That Rome holds of his name – wherein **obscurely**
Caesar's ambition shall be **glanced** at.
And after this let Caesar **seat him sure**,
For we will shake him, or worse days endure.



NOTES

mettle: spirit, disposition (puns on 'metal')

wrought: manipulated

that...disposed: its usual inclination/its natural disposition

meet: right or fitting

their likes: those like them

who: who is

bear me hard: tolerate me grudgingly, dislike me

he...me: Brutus would not be able to sway my views (as I do his)/Caesar would still not be able to entice me

several hands: different styles of handwriting

tending to: concerning

obscurely: covertly, subtly

glanced: hinted

seat him sure: seat himself most securely (in the chair of power), i.e. 'take great care'

Portia and Brutus scene study Act 2 Scene 1 extract

Portia Brutus, my lord.

Brutus Portia, what **mean you**? Wherefore rise you now?

Portia You suddenly arose, and walked about,
Musing, and sighing, with your **arms a-cross**:
Make me acquainted with your cause of grief.

Brutus I am not well in health, and that is all.

Portia Is Brutus sick?

You have some sick offence within your mind.

Brutus You are a true and honourable wife,
As dear to me as are the **ruddy drops**
That visit my sad heart.

Portia If this were true, then should I know this secret.
Tell me your counsels, I will not disclose 'em.

Brutus Oh ye gods!

Render me worthy of this noble wife!

Portia, go in awhile,

And **by and by**, all the

Charactery of my sad brows: I will **construe** to thee.

Portia Thou has some suit to Caesar hast thou not?

Brutus That I have, if it will please Caesar to hear me.

Portia O Brutus! The heavens speed thee in thy
Enterprise.



NOTES

mean you: are you doing

arms a-cross: conventional gesture of melancholy or introspection

ruddy drops: blood

by and by: imminently

construe: explain



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Mark Antony's speech Act 3 Scene 2

Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears
I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him.
The evil that men do lives after them;
The good is oft **interred** with their bones.
So let it be with Caesar. The noble Brutus
Hath told you Caesar was ambitious;
If it were so, it was a grievous fault,
And grievously hath Caesar **answered** it.
Here, under **leave** of Brutus and the rest
(For Brutus is an honourable man;
So are they all, all honourable men),
Come I to speak in Caesar's funeral.
He was my friend, faithful and just to me,
But Brutus says he was ambitious,
And Brutus is an honourable man.
He hath brought many captives home to Rome,
Whose ransoms did the **general coffers** fill.
Did this in Caesar seem ambitious?
When that the poor have cried, Caesar hath wept:
Ambition should be made of sterner stuff.
Yet Brutus says he was ambitious,
And Brutus is an honourable man.
You all did see that on the Lupercal
I thrice presented him a kingly crown,
Which he did thrice refuse. Was this ambition?
Yet Brutus says he was ambitious,
And sure he is an honourable man.
I speak not to disprove what Brutus spoke,
But here I am to speak what I do know.
You all did love him once, not without cause.
What cause withholds you, then, to mourn for him?
O judgment, thou art fled to brutish beasts,
And men have lost their reason! Bear with me;
My heart is in the coffin there with Caesar,
And I must pause till it come back to me.

NOTES

interred: buried
answered: paid for
leave: permission
general coffers: public treasury

Brutus's speech Act 3 Scene 2

Romans, countrymen, and **lovers**, hear me for my **cause**, and be silent that you may hear. Believe me **for** mine honour, and have respect to mine honour that you may believe. **Censure** me in your wisdom, and awake your **senses** that you may the better judge. If there be any in this assembly, any dear friend of Caesar's, to him I say that Brutus's love to Caesar was no less than his. 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 honour him; but, as he was ambitious, I slew him. There is tears for his love, joy for his fortune, honour for his valour, and death for his ambition. Who is here so base that would be a bondman? If any, speak, for him have I offended. Who is here so **rude** that would not be a Roman? If any, speak, for him have I offended. Who is here so **vile** that will not love his country? If any, speak, for him have I offended. I pause for a reply.

NOTES

lovers: friends
cause: grounds for action/explanation
for: because of
censure: judge
senses: minds, wits
rude: uncivilized
vile: lowly, contemptible



ENCORE

Information

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