

The Assassination of Julius Caesar

Nicolaus of Damascus wrote his account of the murder of Caesar a few years after the event. He was not actually present when the assassination occurred but had the opportunity to speak with those who were. He was a friend of Herod the Great and gathered his information during a visit to Rome. His account is thought to be reliable.



The Plan:

"The conspirators never met openly, but they assembled a few at a time in each others' homes. There were many discussions and proposals, as might be expected, while they investigated how and where to execute their design. Some suggested that they should make the attempt as he was going along the Sacred Way, which was one of his favorite walks. Another idea was for it to be done at the elections during which he had to cross a bridge to appoint the magistrates in the Campus Martius; they should draw lots for some to push him from the bridge and for others to run up and kill him. A third plan was to wait for a coming gladiatorial show. The advantage of that would be that, because of the show, no suspicion would be aroused if arms were seen prepared for the attempt. But the majority opinion favored killing him while he sat in the Senate, where he would be by himself since non-Senators would not be admitted, and where the many conspirators could hide their daggers beneath their togas. This plan won the day."

"The Assassination of Julius Caesar, 44 BC," EyeWitness to History, www.eyewitnesstohistory.com (2004).

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Brutus Persuades Caesar to Ignore his Apprehensions:

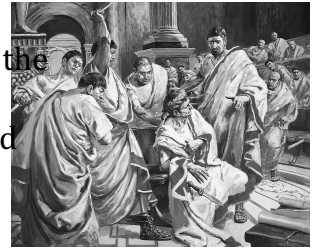
"...his friends were alarmed at certain rumors and tried to stop him going to the Senate-house, as did his doctors, for he was suffering from one of his occasional dizzy spells. His wife, Calpurnia, especially, who was frightened by some visions in her dreams, clung to him and said that she would not let him go out that day. But Brutus, one of the conspirators who was then thought of as a firm friend, came up and said, '*What is this, Caesar? Are you a man to pay attention to a woman's dreams and the idle gossip of stupid men, and to insult the Senate by not going out, although it has honored you and has been specially summoned by you? But listen to me, cast aside the forebodings of all these people, and come. The Senate has been in session waiting for you since early this morning.*' This swayed Caesar and he left."

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Bad Omens:

"Before he entered the chamber, the priests brought up the victims for him to make what was to be his last sacrifice. The omens were clearly unfavorable. After this unsuccessful sacrifice, the priests made repeated other ones, to see if anything more propitious might appear than what had already been revealed to them. In the end they said that they could not clearly see the divine intent, for there was some transparent, malignant spirit hidden in the victims. Caesar was annoyed and abandoned divination till sunset, though the priests continued all the more with their efforts.

Those of the murderers present were delighted at all this, though Caesar's friends asked him to put off the meeting of the Senate for that day because of what the priests had said, and he agreed to do this. But some attendants came up, calling him and saying that the Senate was full. He glanced at his friends, but Brutus approached him again and said, *'Come, good sir, pay no attention to the babblings of these men, and do not postpone what Caesar and his mighty power has seen fit to arrange. Make your own courage your favorable omen.'* He convinced Caesar with these words, took him by the right hand, and led him to the Senate which was quite near. Caesar followed in silence."

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The Attack:

"The Senate rose in respect for his position when they saw him entering. Those who were to have part in the plot stood near him. Right next to him went Tillius Cimber, whose brother had been exiled by Caesar. Under pretext of a humble request on behalf of this brother, Cimber approached and grasped the mantle of his toga, seeming to want to make a more positive move with his hands upon Caesar. Caesar wanted to get up and use his hands, but was prevented by Cimber and became exceedingly annoyed.

That was the moment for the men to set to work. All quickly unsheathed their daggers and rushed at him. First Servilius Casca struck him with the point of the blade on the left shoulder a little above the collar-bone. He had been aiming for that, but in the excitement he missed. Caesar rose to defend himself, and in the uproar Casca shouted out in Greek to his brother. The latter heard him and drove his sword into the ribs. After a moment, Cassius made a slash at his face, and Decimus Brutus pierced him in the side. While Cassius Longinus was trying to give him another blow he missed and struck Marcus Brutus on the hand. Minucius also hit out at Caesar and hit Rubrius in the thigh. They were just like men doing battle against him.

Under the mass of wounds, he fell at the foot of Pompey's statue. Everyone wanted to seem to have had some part in the murder, and there was not one of them who failed to strike his body as it lay there, until, wounded thirty-five times, he breathed his last."

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PRIMARY SOURCE - RESPONSE

Directions: Respond to the primary source by answering at least one question from each category.

OBSERVE

What do you notice first?

Find something
small but interesting.

What do you notice
that you didn't expect?

What do you notice
that you can't explain?

What do you notice
that you didn't earlier?



Empty box for response to the OBSERVE section.

REFLECT

Where do you think
this came from?

Why do you think
somebody made this?

What do you think was
happening when this was made?

Who do you think was
the audience for this item?

What tool was used
to create this?

Why do you think this
item is so important?

If somebody made this today,
what would be different?

What can you learn
from examining this?



Empty box for response to the REFLECT section.

QUESTION

What do you wonder about...

Who?

What?

When?

Where?

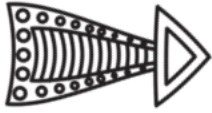
Why?

How?



Empty box for response to the QUESTION section.

PRIMARY SOURCE - WRITTEN ANALYSIS



Write an analysis of the source that...

- * Determines point of view
- * Identifies Bias
- * Explains the purpose or key issues as related to the historical context

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There is no text or other markings on the paper.

PRIMARY SOURCE - ANALYSIS ACTIVITY

OBSERVE ITS PARTS



Who wrote it? _____

Who read / received it? _____

When is it from? _____

TRY TO MAKE SENSE OF IT



What is it talking about? _____

Write one sentence summarizing this document. _____

Why did the author write it? _____

Quote evidence from the document that tells you this. _____

What was happening at the time in history this document was created? _____

USE IT AS HISTORICAL EVIDENCE



What did you find out from this document that you might not learn anywhere else? _____

What other documents or historical evidence are you going to use to help you understand this event or topic?