

TL;DR (may contain spoilers): Julius Caesar is warned of the ides of March, ignores it, and dies; plebeians are way too easily swayed; all the conspirators die too.

Julius Caesar Summary

Jealous conspirators convince Caesar's friend Brutus to join their assassination plot against Caesar. To stop Caesar from gaining too much power, Brutus and the conspirators kill him on the Ides of March. Mark Antony drives the conspirators out of Rome and fights them in a battle. Brutus and his friend Cassius lose and kill themselves, leaving Antony to rule in Rome.

More detail: 2 minute read

Act I

The tribunes of Rome, Marullus and Flavius, break up a gathering of citizens who want to celebrate Julius Caesar's triumphant return from war. The victory is marked by public games in which Caesar's protégé, Mark Antony, takes part. On his way to the arena, Caesar is stopped by a stranger who warns him that he should 'Beware the Ides [15th] of March.'

Against an impressive backdrop of tall classical buildings, standing on the steps of a plinth adorned with classical statues, Mark Antony speaks to a large crowd.

Julius Caesar at Her Majesty's Theatre, 1908

Fellow senators, Caius Cassius and Marcus Brutus, are suspicious of Caesar's reactions to the power he holds in the Republic. They fear he will accept offers to become Emperor. He has been gaining a lot of power recently and people treat him like a god. Cassius, a successful general himself, is jealous of Caesar. Brutus has a more balanced view of the political position. The conspirator Casca enters and tells Brutus of a ceremony held by the plebeians. They offered Caesar a crown three times, and he refused it every time. But the conspirators are still wary of his aspirations.

Act II

Cassius, Casca, and their allies plant false documents to manipulate Brutus to join their cause to remove Caesar. After doing so, they visit Brutus at night in his home to persuade him of their views. There they plan Caesar's death. Brutus is troubled but refuses to confide in his devoted wife, Portia. On 15 March, Caesar's wife, Calpurnia, urges him not to go to the Senate. She has had visionary dreams and fears the portents of the overnight storms.

The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves.

— Julius Caesar, Act 1 Scene 2

Act III

Caesar is nevertheless persuaded by flattery to go to the Capitol. At the Capitol, he is stabbed by each conspirator in turn. As Brutus gives the final blow, Caesar utters the famous phrase:

Et tu, Brute?

— Julius Caesar, Act 3 Scene 1

In a setting of classical pillars, a group of men in togas with raised daggers are crowding around someone in the middle distance. Two figures on the right of them cower away, while in the foreground there is a dead body in a toga.

The Death of Caesar, a 19th century engraving

Act III

Against Cassius's advice, Brutus allows Mark Antony to speak a funeral oration for Caesar in the marketplace. He is allowed under the condition that first Brutus must address the people to explain the conspirators' reasons and their fears for Caesar's ambition. After Brutus speaks, the crowd becomes calm and suppo

his cause. However, Antony, in his speech, questions the motives of the conspirators and reminds the crowd of Caesar's benevolent actions and of his refusal to accept the crown. He also reads them Caesar's will, in which Caesar leaves public land and money to each Roman citizen. Antony's speech stirs the crowd into a murderous riot, and the conspirators are forced to flee from the city.

Mark Antony stands in the centre, his right hand sweeping the cover from Caesar's body which is on a bed below him. He is surrounded by a crowd of figures, some of which show shock or disgust.

Uncovering Caesar's Body, London News, 1881

Act IV

Brutus and Cassius gather an army in Northern Greece and prepare to fight the forces led by Mark Antony. Antony has joined with Caesar's great-nephew, Octavius, and with a man called Lepidus. Away from Rome, Brutus and Cassius are filled with doubts about the future and quarrel over funds for their soldiers' pay. After making amends, they prepare to engage Antony's army at Philippi, despite Cassius' misgivings about the site. Brutus stoically receives news of his wife's suicide in Rome. He then sees Caesar's ghost as he tries to rest and is unable to sleep on the eve of the conflict.

Men at some time are masters of their fates.

— Julius Caesar, Act 1 Scene 2

Greg Wyatt sculpture of Julius Caesar. Primarily a number of faces - Caesar, Brutus, Cassius and Mark Antony - and a number of daggers.

Greg Wyatt sculpture of Julius Caesar in the gardens at Shakespeare's New Place.

Act V

In the battle, the Republicans (led by Brutus) appear to be winning at first. But when Cassius' messenger's horse seems to be overtaken by the enemy, Cassius fears the worst and gets his servant to help him to a quick death. After finding Cassius's body, Brutus commits suicide. He believes this to be the only honorable option left to him. Antony, triumphant on the battlefield, praises Brutus as 'the noblest Roman of them all' and orders a formal funeral before he and Octavius return to rule in Rome.