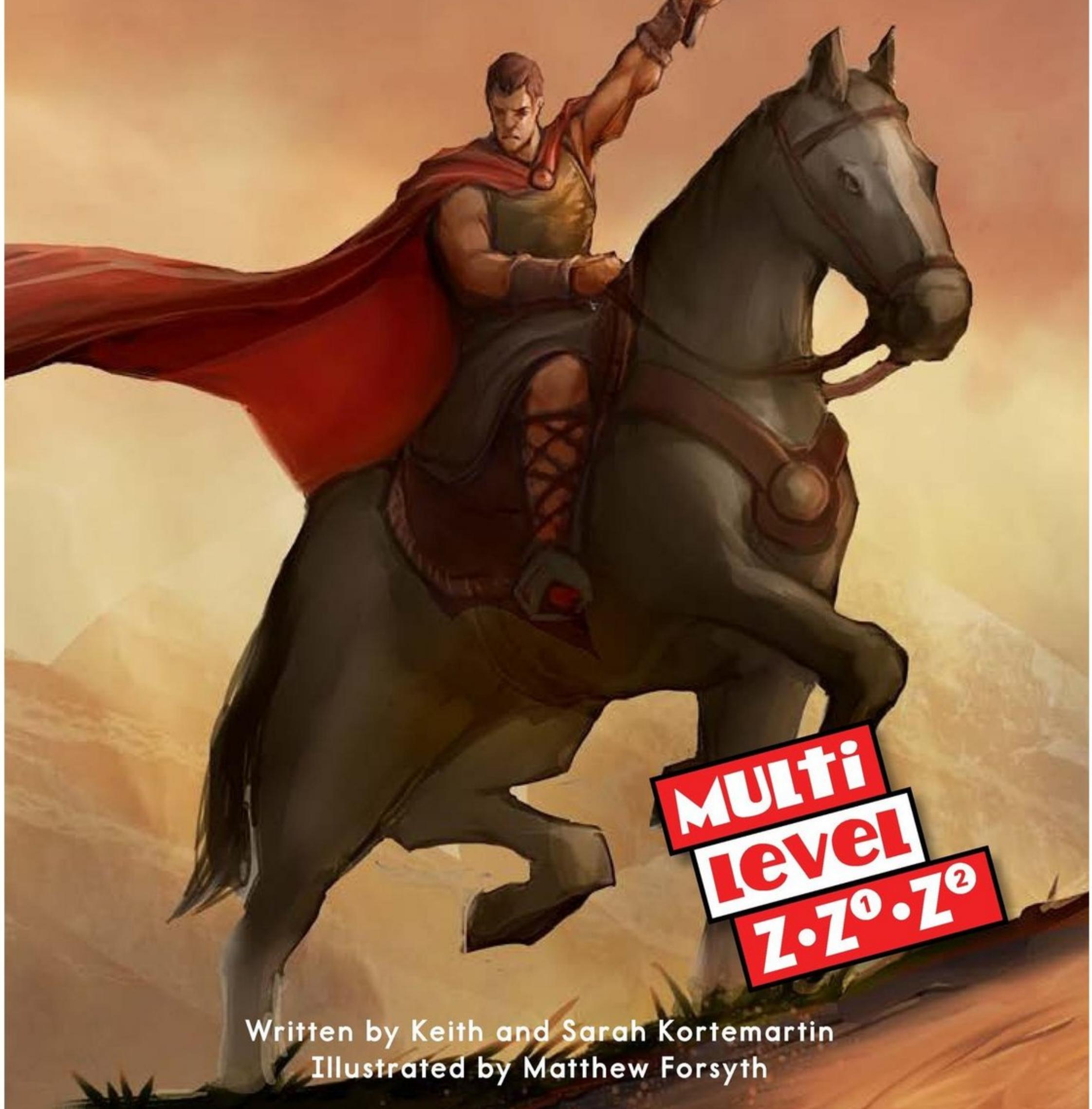


LEVELED BOOK • Z

The Ides of March



Written by Keith and Sarah Kortemartin
Illustrated by Matthew Forsyth

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Focus Question

What happened to Julius Caesar on the Ides of March, and why?

Words to Know

aristocrats

assassinating

conspirators

dais

dictator

ides

legions

liberate

omen

perpetuity

soothsayer

tyranny

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Correlation

| LEVEL Z | |
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| Fountas & Pinnell | U-V |
| Reading Recovery | N/A |
| DRA | 50 |

Italy during the Roman Republic



Julius Caesar was a powerful Roman general who ignited a five-year civil war within the Roman Republic from 49 to 45 BC. The war began immediately after Caesar led his legions to victory over the Gallic tribes. He rewarded his veterans for their victories, and they repaid him with complete loyalty. The Senate, fearing his popularity, commanded him to resign his post and return to Rome. Caesar refused. Instead, he took a single unit of soldiers and crossed the Rubicon River, passing from Gaul into Italy. No Roman general was permitted to lead his armies into Roman territory because it was considered a declaration of war on Rome. After a long political and military struggle, Caesar's forces prevailed, and the Senate surrendered. The defeated senators had no choice but to accept Caesar as dictator in perpetuity of Rome. Caesar gambled on the strength of his armies and the strength of his leadership—and won.

Julius Caesar gazed from the balcony of his home overlooking the city of Rome and mentally measured his route to the Senate House. He paused for a moment, appearing to weigh a decision in his mind. Then, turning on his heel, he called for a servant to bring the wreath and formal toga he wore to great events of the State.



As the servants dressed him, his wife, Calpurnia, rushed into the room and collapsed against a pillar. Caesar strode to her.

"What's this, wife?" he asked. "Have you had ill news?"

"I have had a dream of terrible **omen**, Caesar," Calpurnia replied. "I saw the pediment of this house come crashing down in ruins. As I wept, I looked down to see that I held you, stabbed and dying, in my arms. Do not go forth today, as you value your life and me!"



Caesar looked down at her, frowning. A **soothsayer** had warned Caesar just a few months before of a mortal danger that would follow him until the **Ides** of March—and the Ides of March had arrived.

“Perhaps you are right,” he said to his wife. “In any case, who is the Senate to send for me? I am dictator of the Roman Republic, not their servant. I will not go.”



At the Senate House, Brutus and Cassius gathered about twenty of their colleagues around them, speaking in hushed voices so that no one else might hear them.

“He has said he will not come to the Senate today,” said Cassius. “Must we delay our plan?”

"There is no time to delay," said Brutus impatiently. "Caesar leaves for the next campaign within the week. We have agreed to strike when he is surrounded by men he trusts. We cannot afford to wait until he returns, commanding even more loyalty from the legions. He will use them to seize more power. Someone must convince him to attend."



"I can convince him," said Decimus, stepping forward. "I will go."



"Decimus!" cried Caesar gladly, striding forward to welcome his friend into his home. "I did not expect you."

"But the Senate expects you," Decimus replied, "and this attitude you have taken up does not become you. Will the general worshipped by his armies be intimidated by dreams or sayings? The Senate has called this session to cover you in more glory. Will you refuse their honors?"

Caesar considered this. Decimus's opinion held great weight for him, as the two men had fought side by side throughout the Gallic wars ten years before.

"The Senate has named you dictator for life," Decimus reminded him. "You are all-powerful in Rome. Come and take your rightful place on the Senate floor."



"They have not always been so respectful," murmured Caesar, remembering how he had become dictator for life after a long struggle with the Senate and his crossing of the Rubicon River. That day, he had not known if he was bound for glory or defeat at the hands of his countrymen. He had gathered his courage and acted. *Let the die be cast*, he had thought, and he had urged his horse across the river.

"Let the die be cast," Caesar whispered again. "If there is danger, let us face it." He smiled at Decimus. "Old friend," he said, "your advice is sound. You serve me well in this."

"I serve all Rome in this," Decimus replied, looking away.

Attended by Decimus and his guards, Caesar passed through the streets of Rome in a procession, with the people cheering all around him.

"Indeed they love you, Caesar," said Decimus beside him, frowning slightly.

"Of course they do," said Caesar lightly. "I have given them lands, forgiven their debts, and kept them in good fortune. The people are the soul of Rome, Decimus. We raise them up that they may raise us in return."

"This mob?" said Decimus scornfully. "What do they know of governance?"

"They know what fills their bellies, man," said Caesar, clapping his friend on the shoulder. "The people's praise is sweet to me."

"That we know," said Decimus, so quietly that no one, not even Caesar, heard him.

"Hail, Caesar, king of the Romans!" came a lone voice, shouting through a lull in the noise.

Caesar stopped instantly. "I am not your king," he said clearly into the sudden silence. "Only Jupiter claims that honor among the Romans." Seeing unease in his friend's face, he laughed a little, though his laughter sounded hollow. "What, do you mistrust me? You remember how it happened, and how I refused."

"I remember," said Decimus evenly.



Caesar regarded him for a moment, thinking of what had happened just a month before. At the fertility festival, he had begun to address the crowd when his faithful friend Mark Antony had approached with a crown in his hands. Offering it to Caesar, he had spoken out so that all might hear: "The people crown you through me."

And Caesar had pushed the crown away.

It had been difficult to refuse the crown. The kingship was Caesar's most secret desire. But he knew that it was not yet time, and the title of king struck fear into many Romans. And so he had declined the crown. He could wait.

Even so, something had changed since that moment. There were whisperings among **aristocrats** and rumors spread. *They think me mad for power, Caesar thought, but the government is corrupt, and the people's trust is lost. We will not have peace without a new kind of leadership.*



Decimus was still watching his face. *I will not seize the crown yet, thought Caesar. In the meantime, I am dictator, named for life. I have the substance, if not the title. What man can touch me now?* The words echoed unpleasantly in his mind, and he recalled the words his wife had spoken earlier. Caesar shook off a sudden sense of deep unease.

At the Senate House, Cassius and Brutus again gathered privately with the **conspirators**. Decimus had succeeded—Caesar fast approached, surrounded by the adoring masses.



"Have courage, men," said Cassius. "We must remain steadfast in our purpose."

"We will **liberate** Rome from the **tyranny** of this man who wishes to make himself a king—like the gods themselves," said Brutus, his voice trembling with anger. "This deed falls upon us. Long live the Republic of Rome!"

"Long live the Republic of Rome!" the group agreed resolutely.

As the procession reached the Senate House, Caesar relaxed. No man could bear a weapon in the Senate, and even his guards were not allowed inside. No danger could reach him here.

The Ides of March are here, and I still live, he thought to himself.

But the Ides of March are not yet past, the soothsayer's voice seemed to echo in his mind.

Caesar shook his head and crossed the Senate floor to take his seat. He saw that a group of a dozen senators were already standing behind his throne, waiting for him in stillness. *They do me great honor*, Caesar thought, seating himself.

Immediately, another group came forward from the ranks of senators on the floor, encircling Caesar in a ring of about twenty men. Caesar saw Brutus and Cassius among their ranks, and he smiled in welcome. Brutus, in particular, was a close friend and ally. He turned his attention to the man coming first up the **dais**, a senator named Tillius Cimber.

Cimber grasped his hands respectfully—and then, suddenly, he grabbed the dictator's toga and held it fast, pulling downward as Caesar, alarmed, tried to rise in his chair.

"Why, this is violence!" Caesar cried out.





And then daggers were everywhere, drawn from hiding places underneath the senators' togas. Caesar threw off Cimber's hands and blocked the first blow—but he could not block the others. He was trapped in a ring of death. As Caesar whirled to face attack after attack, he suddenly saw Brutus and Decimus—his dear friends—with daggers lifted in their hands.

A great silence seemed to enclose him then. *They, too?* he thought with sudden clarity. *Even Brutus? Decimus? This is betrayal. This is the end.* And covering his face in his regal toga, Julius Caesar sank beneath dozens of dagger blows, collapsing on the Senate floor.

He died there, bleeding from more than twenty wounds.

The conspirators drew back a little, awestruck by what they had just done.

Caesar's friend Mark Antony, who had heard rumors of the plot against Caesar, burst through the doors of the Senate House with a look of desperation, but he was too late. Upon seeing Caesar on the floor, his face sank and became gray with grief. He turned slowly and stumbled out in a quiet state of horror, back into the unsuspecting crowd, which awaited the return of its beloved leader.





Though Brutus, Decimus, Cassius, and the rest of the conspirators believed that they had freed Rome from a great tyrant, the liberation did not go according to plan. The Gallic legions, enraged at Caesar's murder, rose up in revolt against the conspirators and their allies. The result was yet another civil war between a pro-Caesar faction led by Mark Antony and an anti-Caesar faction led by the conspirators. In the end, the conspirators were defeated, and Caesar's adopted son Octavian became the first emperor of Rome. In assassinating Caesar, the conspirators did not save the Roman Republic. Instead, they set in motion a chain of events that eventually spelled the end of the Republic and the rise of the Roman Empire.

Glossary

| | |
|------------------------------------|--|
| aristocrats (<i>n.</i>) | members of a society's highest social class, who are usually wealthy and powerful (p. 10) |
| assassinating (<i>v.</i>) | killing in a planned attack, often for political purposes (p. 15) |
| conspirators (<i>n.</i>) | people involved in a secret plan to do something illegal or harmful (p. 11) |
| dais (<i>n.</i>) | a low platform for speaking or for seating persons of honor (p. 12) |
| dictator (<i>n.</i>) | a leader who rules with total power, usually by force (p. 3) |
| ides (<i>n.</i>) | the day around the middle of the month in the ancient Roman calendar, usually the fifteenth or thirteenth (p. 5) |
| legions (<i>n.</i>) | large units of soldiers in an army, particularly in the ancient Roman army (p. 3) |
| liberate (<i>v.</i>) | to set free or release from (p. 11) |
| omen (<i>n.</i>) | a sign or indication of something to come (p. 4) |
| perpetuity (<i>n.</i>) | the state or quality of lasting forever or for a very long time (p. 3) |
| soothsayer (<i>n.</i>) | a person who tells fortunes or predicts the future (p. 5) |
| tyranny (<i>n.</i>) | harsh or cruel acts by a person or group in power (p. 11) |

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A Reading A-Z Level Z Leveled Book

Word Count: 1,745

Connections

Writing

If you had lived during Julius Caesar's lifetime, would you have supported him? Write a persuasive essay explaining your position and persuading others to join your side.

Social Studies

Write a biography of Julius Caesar. Use information from the book as well as outside resources.



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