

Julius Caesar

A Reading A-Z Level Z2 Leveled Book
Word Count: 2,124

Connections

Writing

Were Caesar's enemies justified in plotting to assassinate him? Why or why not? Write a persuasive essay stating your side of the argument. Use outside resources and facts from the book to support your answer.

Social Studies

Research more information about Augustus Caesar, the first emperor of Rome. Write an essay comparing and contrasting Augustus Caesar with Julius Caesar, highlighting their political and military careers.

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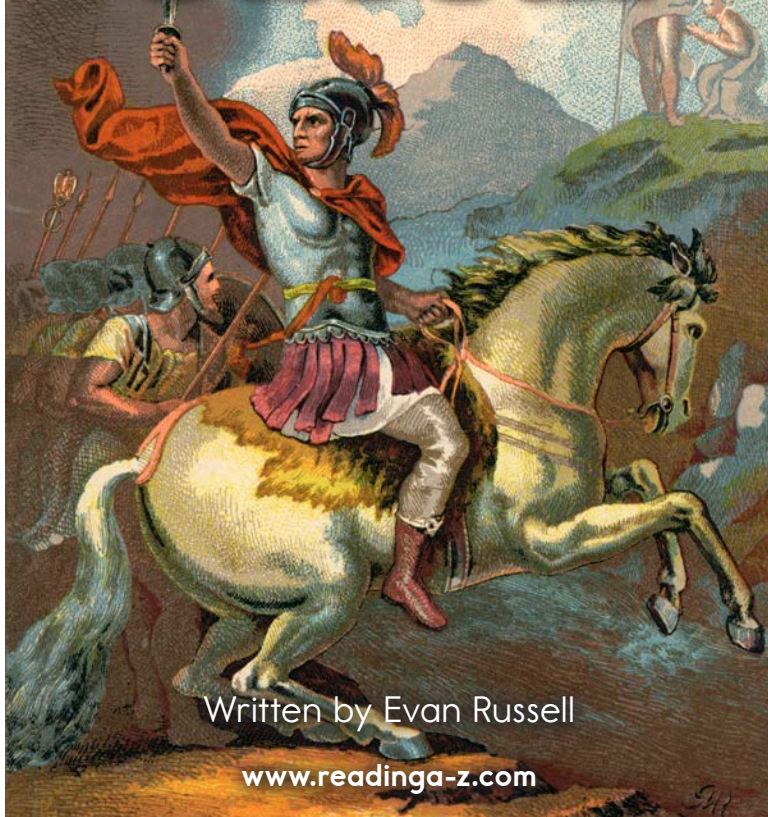
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Focus Question

In what ways did Julius Caesar shape the development of ancient Rome?

Words to Know

aristocracy	lucrative
benevolent	martyr
city-states	orator
intrigues	ruthless
judicious	tactician
lenient	vehemently

Front cover: An oil painting by Peter Paul Rubens from the seventeenth-century shows Julius Caesar with a crown of laurel leaves.

Title page: An image shows Caesar leading his army on horseback.

Page 3: A seventeenth-century painting by Pietro da Cortona shows Caesar giving Cleopatra the throne of Egypt.

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Julius Caesar
World Leaders
Level Z2 Leveled Book
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Correlation

LEVEL Z2

Fountas & Pinnell	Y-Z
Reading Recovery	N/A
DRA	70+



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Creator of the Roman Empire

Military commander, politician, and acclaimed **orator** Gaius Julius Caesar was a complex man. The people and his soldiers loved him, but he could be singularly **ruthless** in his dealings with enemy combatants and political foes. He was an adept negotiator and politician, yet many in the Roman Senate considered Caesar lawless, power mad, and a danger to Rome. He

was a charming man known to be hilariously funny at times. He was physically tireless, though he also had health issues and may have been prone to seizures. Mostly, though, Caesar was an achiever. He possessed boundless energy and drive, and accomplished astonishing things in his lifetime. As a leader, Caesar changed the world map, affecting language, government, and even the calendar perhaps more than any other.

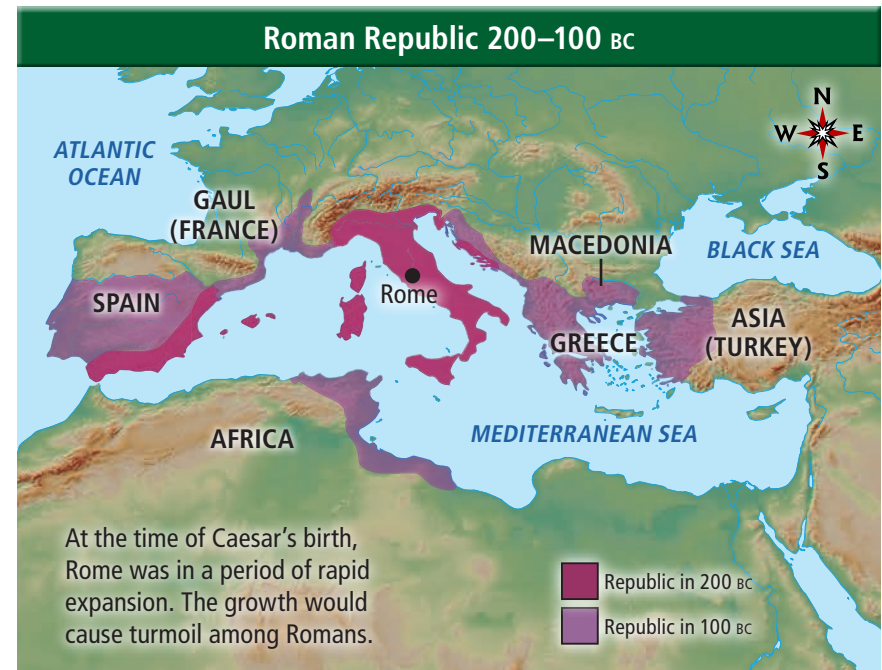


The World in Caesar's Time

Rome has a 2,800-year history, and to understand Caesar's crucial role in this history, it is important to understand the world he was born into.

Rome and its neighboring **city-states** on the Italian Peninsula largely shared the same language, culture, and religion. They sometimes fought one another, but they also formed alliances when threatened by invaders. In time, Rome emerged as the dominant city-state. According to legend, Rome was ruled by kings—six **benevolent** and the seventh a terror. In 509 BC, legend has it that the Roman people rose up and expelled the seventh king, Superbus.

The citizens who formed the Roman Republic fundamentally distrusted the idea of a monarchy—they wanted no more kings. Instead, they relied increasingly on a legislative body called the Senate made up of men chosen by two annually elected magistrates called *consuls*. In place of a king, the consuls oversaw the government. In times of military emergency, a dictator could be appointed over the consuls, but only temporarily.



Two social orders existed in the Roman Republic. Members of the wealthy **aristocracy** were the *patricians*, while lesser landowners and everyone else were *plebeians*. Political tension persisted between the two groups.

Under this system, the Roman Republic flourished, and by 250 BC Rome controlled most of the Italian Peninsula. It expanded west into Spain, north into Gaul (present-day France), east into Macedonia and Asia (present-day Turkey), and south into Northern Africa. As Rome conquered these regions, provinces were established and ruled by governors. A provincial governorship was a **lucrative** and sought-after

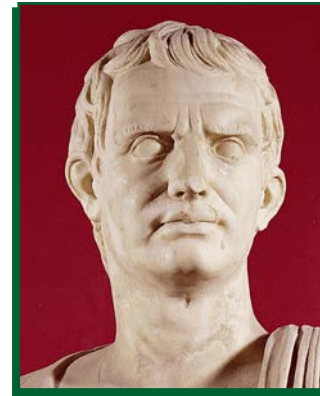
appointment since governors could make large amounts of money by providing food and slaves for Rome. Under these conditions, corruption was rampant in provincial government.

Regular citizens back in Rome didn't profit from the provinces in any way. Rome's local economy was poor, which increased tensions between the plebeians and the patricians. The division between the rich and poor became insufferable and resulted in the Social War (91–89 BC). At the time of Caesar's birth, two men vied for power in Rome: Lucius Cornelius Sulla had the support of the patricians, and Gaius Marius stood for the plebeians.

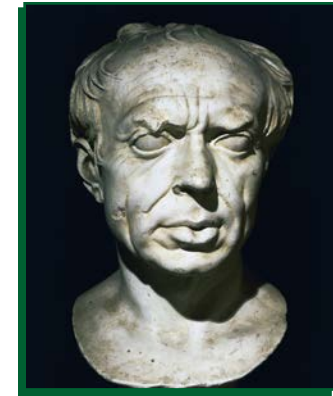
Caesar's Early Life

Caesar was born on July 12 or 13, 100 BC. His family was aristocratic but not particularly wealthy or important, and they sympathized with plebeian causes. Caesar's aunt married Marius, the leader who opposed Sulla.

We know little of Caesar's early life. His parents educated him well and probably expected him to pursue a political career. When he was sixteen, his father died abruptly, thrusting Caesar to the head of his family. In that same year, he married Cornelia, the daughter of Marius's political ally.



Lucius Cornelius Sulla



Gaius Marius

Shortly thereafter, Sulla ascended to power in Rome, and he commanded the young Caesar to divorce Cornelia. When Caesar refused to do so, he aligned himself directly with Marius and the plebeian cause. The danger of doing this was great—he stood to be stripped of his property and possibly his life—so Caesar joined the army and left to serve in the east, escaping the dangers of Rome.

Because he was an aristocrat, Caesar served as an officer in the military. He enjoyed running military campaigns in the east, and he was well liked by the *legionnaires*, or soldiers. But when Sulla died in 78 BC, Caesar decided to return to Rome and pursue his political career. He worked as a lawyer in the Senate, and in 75 BC he decided to study oratory, or public speaking. He was sailing to Rhodes, Greece, to take up this pursuit when pirates kidnapped him.

According to Caesar's own accounts, Caesar befriended his captors and jokingly insisted that they ask for a higher ransom, which they did. When Caesar raised and paid the ransom, he joked that he would return one day for payback. He raised a small naval force, captured the pirates, and crucified them.



As Caesar grew older and balder, he wore a crown of laurel leaves.

Back in Rome, Caesar enjoyed a string of political triumphs. He was particularly skilled at maneuvering through the many political **intrigues** of Rome. After Cornelia died in 69 BC, Caesar married Pompeia, the daughter of his powerful

political ally Pompey. With Pompey as a mentor, Caesar served in a number of important political offices. In 63 BC he was elected Pontifex Maximus, the high priest of the Roman religion. Eventually, Caesar divorced Pompeia and was appointed governor of the province of Farther Spain (present-day western Spain and Portugal) in 61 BC.

Caesar in Gaul: The Leader

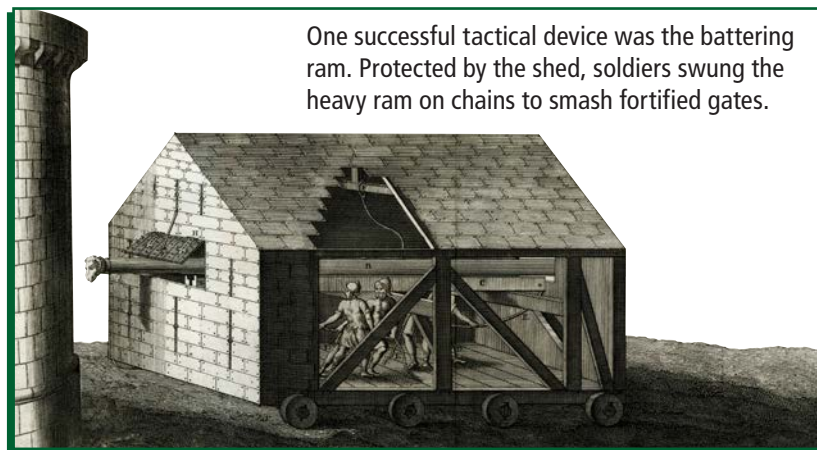
After serving as governor of Farther Spain, Caesar returned to Rome and ran for the prestigious office of consul. He was elected in 59 BC, even though a great many patrician senators **vehemently** opposed him. After serving a year as consul, Caesar managed to have himself designated as governor of Cisalpine Gaul. This province was located in what is today northern Italy. Cisalpine would give Caesar a region for military recruitment where he could plan for expansion. His appointment was for four years. When the man designated to govern Transalpine Gaul, the province to the west, died suddenly, a Roman official gave Caesar that as well. During this same short period of time, he married his third wife, Calpurnia, sealing his alliance with yet another politically powerful family.

Romans considered everything to the north—northern France, Germany, and Belgium—to be frontier. Ambitious governors before Caesar had led armies beyond the frontier, but few with much success. In fact, some had suffered spectacular defeats at the hands of the northern tribes.

In Rome, the northern tribes were the stuff of legends. People knew little about them, and the Roman soldiers feared and respected them.

Man-for-man, the northern warriors were probably superior to Caesar's forces—at least at first. However, Caesar and his men had certain advantages over the bigger, stronger, and tougher northerners. Most of the time, Caesar fought particular tribes that he outnumbered. The Roman legions were far better organized; their chain of command and communications enabled them to maneuver rapidly and effectively. Their equipment exceeded that of the northerners as well. Finally, they had Caesar.

Caesar's men loved him, with good reason. He was a brilliant **tactician** who had amazing military instincts. Caesar's massive and infectious energy motivated people. Physically tough and utterly fearless in battle, Caesar led his men on foot and insisted his officers do the same. He took advantage of the latest technology and had



his men build machines called *siege engines*, which the legionnaires used to attack fortified armies and which saved the lives of countless Roman soldiers. A great and sympathetic leader of men, Caesar won the respect of his soldiers, and he would always have their undying support.

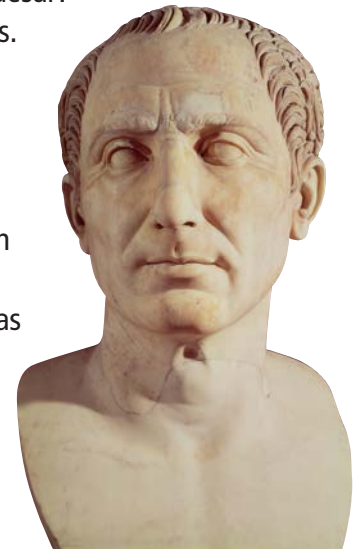
In Gaul, Caesar immediately faced battles from Germanic tribes. According to Caesar's account, he led his somewhat panicked soldiers against them, worked the men into frenzy, and proceeded to defeat the adversaries. This pattern would continue throughout his time in Gaul.

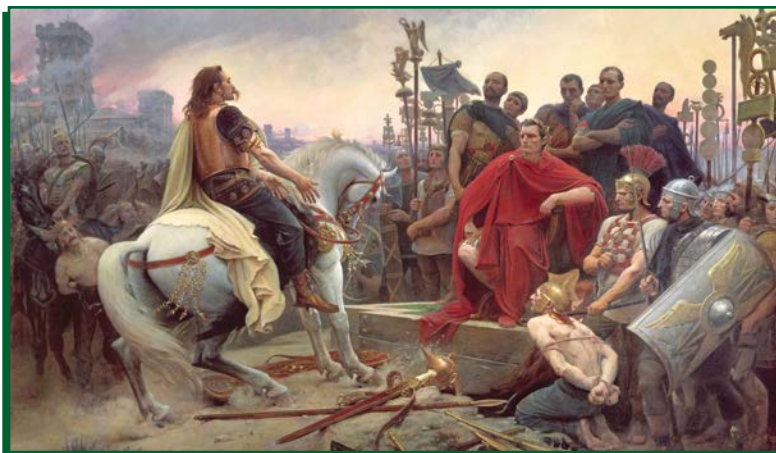
Do You Know?

Anyone interested in learning more about Caesar's military campaigns can read . . . Caesar! Caesar wrote about his experiences. Remarkably, his own account of the Gallic Wars and other conflicts survive.

Historians agree that Caesar likely put a positive spin on his own actions, but readers who can see beyond that appreciate the works as gripping accounts of some of the most famous events in history.

Caesar's writings are often required reading for anyone studying Latin.





In a painting by Lionel Royer, Vercingetorix surrenders to Caesar after the Battle of Alesia.

He suffered setbacks occasionally, but beyond question, historians consider Caesar one of the greatest generals the world has known.

Caesar's military achievements include bridging the Rhine River, leading his armies into Germany, and crossing the English Channel to Britain—twice. Finally, in 52 BC, Caesar faced a last, united opposition of Gallic tribes led by the mighty Vercingetorix. When Caesar triumphed at the Battle of Alesia, Gaul was unified once and for all, and the importance of this achievement was great. The Romanizing influence—monetary systems, governance, and engineering—all greatly affected how Europe would develop. Caesar's relentless campaigning made him rich and a popular hero in Rome.

The First Triumvirate

While in Gaul, Caesar had political agents and allies working for him in Rome. Caesar was a politician as well as a general, and he needed to remain sharp politically to survive the political scene in Rome—a scene fraught with peril.

Caesar and the powerful Pompey had cemented their alliance when Pompey married Caesar's daughter, Julia, in 59 BC, the year he was elected consul. Then Caesar managed to unite Pompey with another political ally named Crassus, one of the wealthiest men in all of Rome. The two had formerly been political opponents, and their union was a brilliant stroke by Caesar. Working together, Pompey, Caesar, and Crassus held massive political sway in Rome; they are now known as the First Triumvirate.

As Caesar's star rose, the other two men became resentful. In 56 BC, the three may have met in Cisalpine Gaul, where experts think they agreed that Crassus and Pompey would serve as consuls the next year and, as such, would ensure that Caesar's rule of Gaul would not end before 50 BC.

However, when Caesar's daughter, Julia, died in 54 BC, the ties by marriage between Pompey and Caesar were severed. The following year, Crassus died in battle. The alliance between Pompey and

Caesar crumbled and the two became bitter rivals. As news of Caesar's triumphs in Gaul reached Rome, Pompey allied himself more and more closely with the Senate's patrician faction, which also perceived Caesar as a threat.

Return to Rome

In 50 BC, Caesar wanted to return to Rome, but the Senate declared that he must give up command of his legions. They did not, however, demand that Pompey relinquish command of his armies. Caesar rightly suspected that if he returned to Rome as a private citizen, he would be subject to arrest and possibly killed.

Therefore, in 49 BC, Caesar traveled with his army to the Rubicon River, which marked the border of Cisalpine Gaul and Italy. He knew that bringing an army into Italy was an act of war, but he had no choice. He could not wrest control of the corrupt government in Rome any other way, and he believed he had the Roman people's support.



Caesar leads his legion across the Rubicon River into Italy.

When Caesar crossed the Rubicon, civil war ignited. Caesar drove Pompey's troops, who were no match for his seasoned warriors, out of Italy, into Spain. With astonishing speed, Caesar pursued, engaged, and annihilated them. Pompey escaped to the eastern Mediterranean by sea, but Caesar followed him and, in Greece, crushed his remaining troops. Pompey then fled to Egypt, where assassins murdered him on the orders of the Egyptian ruler Ptolemy. Caesar followed Pompey to Egypt, where he met and began a relationship with Ptolemy's sister, Cleopatra, who vied with Ptolemy for the rule of Egypt. Caesar had a son with Cleopatra, and he restored her to the throne of Egypt. Caesar returned to Rome a triumphant hero. In 46 BC, he declared himself dictator.





Caesar's Murder by German painter Karl Theodor von Piloty

Caesar's concentration of power enraged and frightened his opponents in the Senate. The Roman people had sworn that they would never again be ruled by a single monarch, but it seemed to them that Caesar was doing exactly that.

In his short time as head of state, Caesar instituted many reforms: he updated the taxation system, began great public works, and expanded the Senate—padding it with his own supporters. A surprisingly **lenient** ruler, Caesar forgave many of those who had supported Pompey and even granted them important positions. Caesar meant to reform the republic, but the mixture of his perceived arrogance and his leniency led to his downfall. A group of senators conspired against him, and on March 15, 44 BC, the Ides of March, they attacked and murdered Caesar.



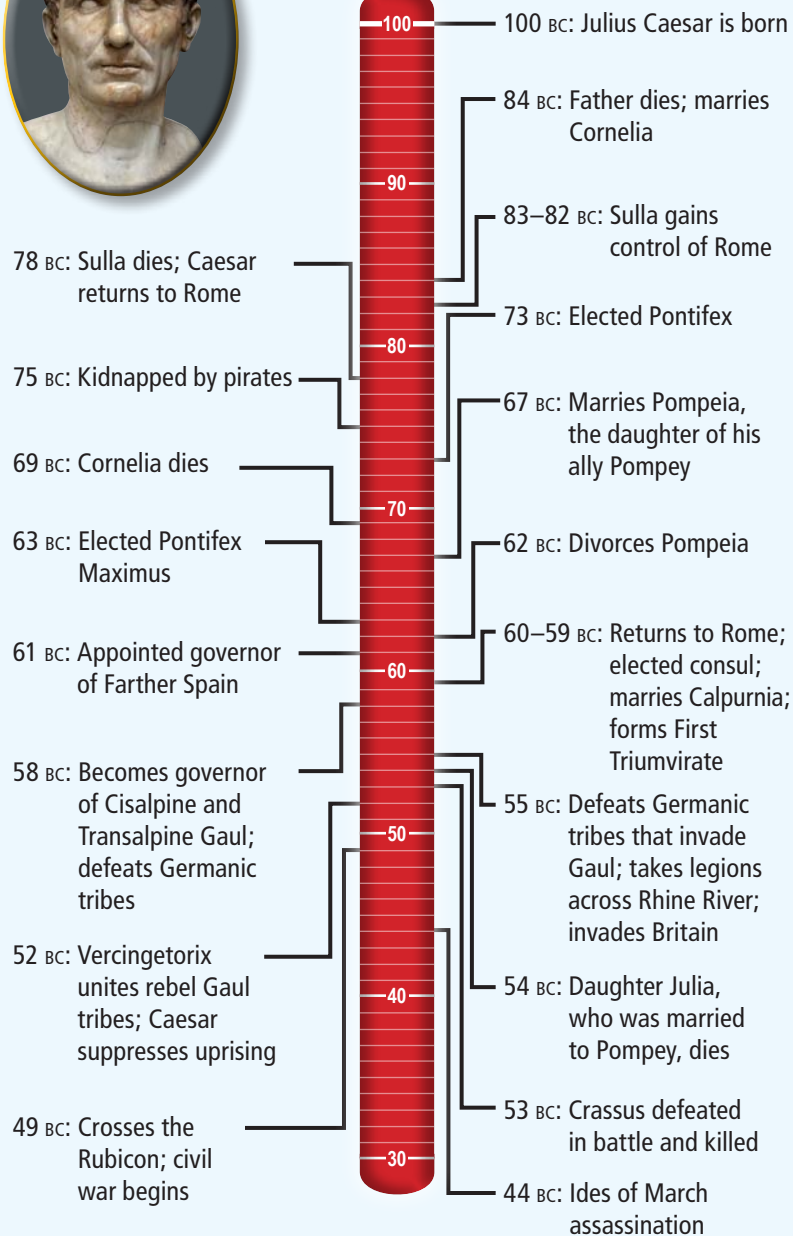
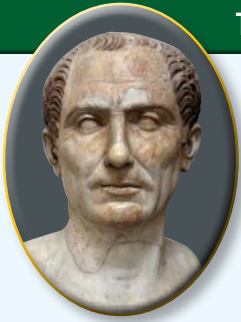
A coin dated 44 BC shows Julius Caesar with Venus on the reverse side. Caesar's family traced their origins to the goddess Venus.

Legacy of Gaius Julius Caesar

Upon his murder, Caesar instantly became a **martyr**, and in 42 BC he was deified—declared a god. But the immediate aftermath of his assassination was chaos: the streets of Rome were awash with violence and, tragically, more civil war ensued. After years of conflict, Caesar's great-nephew Octavian rose from the tumult to become Emperor Augustus Caesar—the first Roman emperor. During his **judicious** reign, the empire would largely stabilize.

It is impossible to know what Caesar might have accomplished had he not been assassinated. This brilliant man of ceaseless energy set out to repair the broken republic, and in a sense he succeeded. The Roman Empire that he put in motion carried on for centuries and, for better or worse, it shaped modern Europe and much of our world today.

The Life of Julius Caesar



Glossary

aristocracy (<i>n.</i>)	members of a society's highest social class, who are usually wealthy and powerful (p. 6)
benevolent (<i>adj.</i>)	generous or kind (p. 5)
city-states (<i>n.</i>)	cities or urban areas that act as independent countries (p. 5)
intrigues (<i>n.</i>)	secret plans or the act of making them (p. 9)
judicious (<i>adj.</i>)	having or showing good sense or wise judgment (p. 18)
lenient (<i>adj.</i>)	very forgiving or tolerant (p. 17)
lucrative (<i>adj.</i>)	producing a lot of money; profitable (p. 6)
martyr (<i>n.</i>)	a person who suffers or dies because of his or her beliefs or actions (p. 18)
orator (<i>n.</i>)	a public speaker, especially an eloquent one (p. 4)
ruthless (<i>adj.</i>)	pitiless and cruel; completely lacking morals (p. 4)
tactician (<i>n.</i>)	someone who is good at carefully planning how to achieve a goal (p. 11)
vehemently (<i>adv.</i>)	strongly and with great emotion (p. 10)