

The Ides of March

A Reading A-Z Level Z2 Leveled Book
Word Count: 2,129

LEVELED BOOK • Z²

The Ides of March

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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**Multi
level
Z¹•Z²**

Written by Keith and Sarah Kortemartin
Illustrated by Matthew Forsyth

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Words to Know

acclamation	ides
aggrandize	legions
assassinating	liberate
capitulated	omen
conclave	perpetuity
conspirators	propitious
dais	protégés
dictator	soothsayer
foreboding	tyranny



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Focus Question

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

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Correlation

LEVEL Z2

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

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 richly for their victories, and they repaid him with utter devotion. The Senate, fearing his popularity with his men, commanded him to disband his armies, resign his post, and return to Rome. Caesar refused. Instead, he made a contentious move: he took a single legion and crossed the Rubicon River, passing from Gaul into Italy. This action was expressly forbidden by Roman law—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 **capitulated**. The defeated senators had no choice but to accept Caesar as **dictator** of Rome in **perpetuity**. 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, which spread out majestically before him, and mentally measured his route to the Senate House. He paused for a moment, appearing to weigh a decision in his mind. Then, turning decisively on his heel, he summoned a servant to bring the wreath of laurel and the purple and gilt-adorned toga he wore to governmental functions and great events of the State.



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

“What’s this, wife?” he asked her. “Have you had ill news?”

"I have had a dream of dire **omen**, Caesar," Calpurnia replied, shuddering. "You must not attend upon the Senate today. Such a horror as I dreamt! I saw the pediment of this house come crashing down in ruins, and as I wept, I looked down to see that I held your body, stabbed and dying, in my arms. Do not venture forth today, Caesar! Do not, as you value your life and me!"



Caesar looked down at her, frowning, for he knew that the day held danger: this was not the first dreadful omen he had

received. The **soothsayer**, Spurinna, had warned Caesar just a few months before of a mortal danger that would stalk him until the **Ides** of March—and the Ides of March had arrived. Today the danger would be most acute.

"Perhaps you are right," he said to his wife. "We know that peril stalks me this day, and in any case, who is the Senate to summon me to their **conclave**? 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 might overhear their plans.



"He has said he will not come to the Senate today," said Cassius. "Must we delay our plan until a more **propitious** moment?"

"There is no time to postpone," said Brutus impatiently. "Caesar leaves for the next campaign within the week. You know we have agreed to strike on the floor of the Senate itself, where he will be surrounded by men he trusts, and where he will suspect nothing until it is too late. We cannot afford to wait until he returns from his campaign, flushed with yet more glory, commanding even more loyalty from the legions. He will use them to seize even more power for himself. We must act today. Someone must persuade 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 assumed that you would still be closeted with the Senate; I did not expect you."

"But the Senate expects you," Decimus chided, "and this attitude you have taken up ill becomes you. Will the general worshipped by his armies, the hero-conqueror of Gaul, be cowed by dreams or sayings? The Senate awaits you. They have called this session especially for you, to cover you in yet more glory. It is rude of you to 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 a decade before; Decimus had risen in Caesar's wake to become a great military commander in his own right and was now counted among Rome's most powerful men.

"The Senate has named you dictator for life," Decimus reminded him. What has Julius Caesar to fear from them? 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 of Rome for life after a long struggle with the Senate and his contentious crossing of the Rubicon River. Standing on the banks of the Rubicon that day, there had been no guarantees: he had not known if he was bound for glory or defeat at the hands of his countrymen. Caesar had prayed; he had offered a mighty sacrifice to the gods; and finally, he had gathered his courage and acted. *Let the die be cast*, he had thought, and he had urged his horse forward, 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 triumphal procession, with the Roman people roaring in **acclamation** 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, kept them in prosperity; I've rewarded our veterans with the riches they have earned. The people are the soul of Rome, Decimus. Never forget from whence our power comes. We raise them up that they may raise us in their turn."



"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." Turning to Decimus, he said, "They persist." 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 levelly.



Caesar regarded him for a moment, thinking of what had happened just a month before. At the Lupercalia fertility festival, he had mounted a pedestal to address the crowd when his faithful friend and supporter Mark Antony had approached with a crown in his hands. Offering it to Caesar, he had spoken out in a great voice 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, to be sure: the kingship was Caesar’s dearest, and most secret, ambition. But he knew that the time was not yet ripe: the idea of the Republic was dear to many Romans, and the title of king struck fear into many. And so he had declined the crown. He could wait.

Nevertheless, something had changed since that moment; there were whisperings among the aristocracy, sidelong glances, rumors spread. *They suspect my ambition, and they think me mad for power,* Caesar thought, *but their own power is what is truly under threat. The government is corrupt, and the people’s trust is lost. We will not have peace or prosperity without a new kind of leadership; the people know this, and they praise me.*



Decimus was still watching his face. *I will not seize the kingship 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 of ill omen his wife had spoken earlier. Caesar shook off a sudden sense of deep **foreboding**.



At the Senate House, Cassius and Brutus again stole away to confer with the **conspirators**, out of earshot of their colleagues. Decimus had succeeded—Caesar fast approached, surrounded by the adoring masses.

“Have courage, men,” said Cassius.
“Caesar comes, and we must remain steadfast in our purpose.”

“We will **liberate** Rome from the **tyranny** of this man who longs to make himself a king—like unto the gods themselves,” said Brutus, his voice trembling with anger. “This deed falls upon us. We will not tolerate a ruler who cares not for the interests of Rome and seeks only to **aggrandize** himself. 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: the danger the seer had spoken of must now be past, since no man could bear a weapon in the Senate, and even his guards were not allowed inside. Surely no doom could befall him here.

The Ides of March are here, and yet I 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 attentive silence. *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 settled into his throne and turned his attention to the man advancing first up the **dais**, a senator named Tillius Cimber. *A most promising young man*, Caesar thought, preparing to hear his request.

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 second, third, or fourth. The ring of senators had become a ring of death.

As Caesar whirled to face attack after attack, he suddenly saw Brutus and Decimus—his **protégés**, supporters, and dear friends—with daggers lifted in their hands.

A great well of 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, breathing hard and 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 too late—upon seeing Caesar on the floor, his face sank and became ashen 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 Brutus and the other 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 death of the Republic and the birth of the Roman Empire.

Glossary

acclamation (<i>n.</i>)	a loud demonstration of praise, approval, or welcome (p. 9)
aggrandize (<i>v.</i>)	to make or make to appear greater by enhancing power or reputation (p. 13)
assassinating (<i>v.</i>)	killing in a planned attack, often for political purposes (p. 18)
capitulated (<i>v.</i>)	stopped resisting or fighting a demand; gave up and agreed to do something (p. 3)
conclave (<i>n.</i>)	a private or secret gathering or assembly (p. 5)
conspirators (<i>n.</i>)	people involved in a secret plan to do something illegal or harmful (p. 13)
dais (<i>n.</i>)	a low platform for speaking or for seating persons of honor (p. 15)
dictator (<i>n.</i>)	a leader who rules with total power, usually by force (p. 3)
foreboding (<i>n.</i>)	a sense that something bad will happen; a bad feeling about future events (p. 12)

ides (<i>n.</i>)	in the ancient Roman calendar, the day around the middle of the month, 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. 13)
omen (<i>n.</i>)	a sign or indication of something to come (p. 5)
perpetuity (<i>n.</i>)	the state of lasting forever or for a very long time (p. 3)
propitious (<i>adj.</i>)	likely to succeed because of favorable circumstances (p. 6)
protégés (<i>n.</i>)	people who are coached, mentored, or supported by someone who is usually older, with more experience and knowledge (p. 16)
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. 13)