



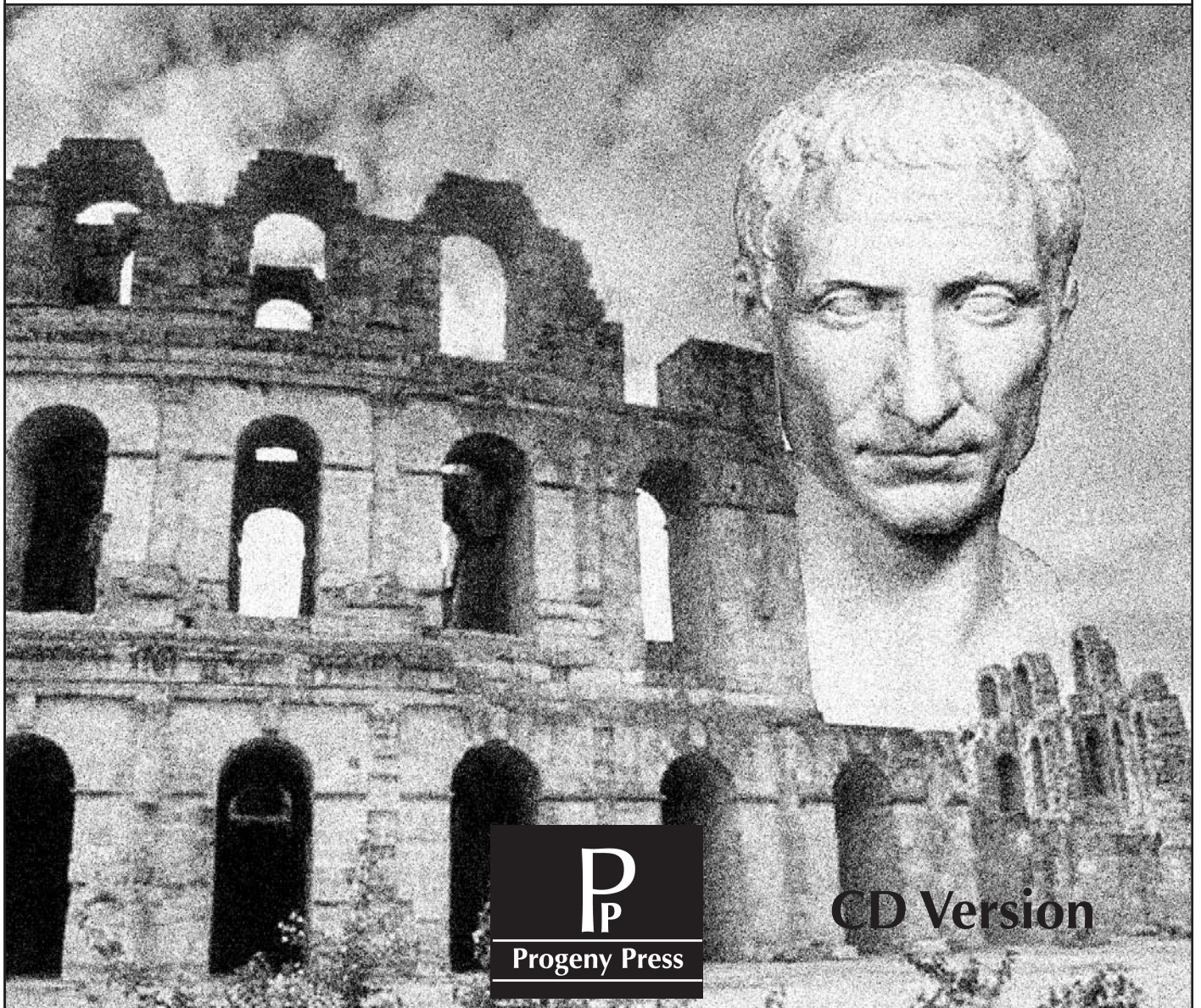
The Plays of William Shakespeare



JULIUS CAESAR

Study Guide

by Michael S.
Gilleland



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Progeny Press

CD Version

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Julius Caesar Study Guide, CD Version
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Synopsis

*My son, if sinners entice you, do not give in to them. If they say,
“Come along with us; let’s lie in wait for someone’s blood, let’s waylay some harmless soul;
let’s swallow them alive, like the grave, and whole, like those who go down to the pit;
we will get all sorts of valuable things and fill our houses with plunder;
throw in your lot with us, and we will share a common purse”
—my son, do not go along with them, do not set foot on their paths;
for their feet rush into sin, they are swift to shed blood.
How useless to spread a net in full view of all the birds!
These men lie in wait for their own blood; they waylay only themselves!
Such is the end of all who go after ill-gotten gain; it takes away
the lives of those who get it.—Proverbs 1:10–19*

The machinations of a few powerful men have begun to threaten the republican ideal of Roman governance, and some among the nobility believe Julius Caesar is the embodiment of this threat.

Caius Cassius and a band of patricians have decided that Caesar must die, but they believe they need the support of Caesar’s friend, the popular Marcus Brutus, to lend legitimacy to their plans. Brutus already seems to fear Caesar and soon succumbs to their influence and joins their plot. Once persuaded, however, Brutus brings an almost religious fervor to the conspiracy, cloaking their actions in robes of glory and virtually taking control of the decisionmaking.

Caesar is not without warnings of his danger, however: a soothsayer warns Caesar to “Beware the ides of March,” strange visions appear in Rome, and his wife Calphurnia has a terrible dream of death. But as Cicero says of the portents, “men may construe things after their fashion, clean from the purpose of the things themselves,” and Caesar does not recognize, or explains away, the importance of the warnings, declaring himself above fear and danger.

March 15 arrives and Caesar, ignoring the pleas of his wife and sure of his own power, goes to the Roman Senate. As they plead mercy for one of their associates, and

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as Caesar declares himself immovable and superior, the conspirators draw their daggers and slaughter Caesar, who dies at the feet of the statue of Pompey, his predecessor.

As the citizens of Rome flee in confusion, the conspirators bathe their arms in Caesar's blood and proclaim themselves liberators of the state of Rome. Mark Antony, friend of Caesar, begs an audience with Brutus. Cassius and Brutus explain their justifications for killing Caesar and Antony declares himself satisfied, begging only that they allow him to give Caesar's funeral oration. Brutus gives him permission over Cassius' objections. Antony uses his oration to remind the people of Rome of the greatness of Caesar and turn them against the conspirators, who are then forced flee Rome. Mark Antony joins forces with Caesar's nephew, Octavius Caesar, against the conspirators to seize control of Rome and finally wreak vengeance on the murderers of Julius Caesar.

Act Two

Alas, my lord, your wisdom is consumed in confidence.

Vocabulary:

In the blank next to each vocabulary word below, write the letter from the definition on the right that most accurately defines the word.

- | | | |
|-------|-----------------|--|
| _____ | 1. spurn | a. correction, reformation |
| _____ | 2. adder | b. belong, refer, or relate to |
| _____ | 3. base | c. contemptuously kick or step on |
| _____ | 4. augmented | d. appearance, countenance |
| _____ | 5. instigations | e. poisonous snake, viper |
| _____ | 6. redress | f. urgings, goads |
| _____ | 7. whet | g. person making a petition or request |
| _____ | 8. visage | h. low rank or position |
| _____ | 9. appertain | i. sharpen; stimulate |
| _____ | 10. suitor | j. made greater or larger |

Fact, Opinion, Generalization, and Metaphor:

In reading persuasive writing or listening to a persuasive speech, it becomes important to be able to separate fact from opinion (personal thoughts or beliefs) or generalization (implying that something is always or universally true) and metaphor (using imagery to create a word-picture). For instance, one man might say of another man, “A dog returns to his vomit. Lucius has stolen before and he’ll steal again.” Within this statement is a generalization, which in this case is also a metaphor (“a dog returns to his vomit”), a fact (“Lucius has stolen before”), and an opinion (“he’ll steal again”). Generalizations and metaphors can make rhetoric more colorful and perhaps more

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understandable or immediate to the reader or listener, but they often have little factual validity in an argument. A good, strong argument should have opinions that are based upon strong facts that may be then *communicated* through generalizations and metaphors.

For each of the sentences below, determine whether it is a fact, opinion, generalization, and/or metaphor, and write **F** for fact, **O** for opinion, **G** for generalization, or **M** for metaphor in the blank next to the sentence. Some sentences may be both **G** and **M**.

- ___ 1. And for my part I know no personal cause to spurn at him, but for the general.
 - ___ 2. He would be crowned: how that might change his nature, there's the question.
 - ___ 3. It is the bright day that brings forth the adder, and that craves wary walking.
 - ___ 4. Crown him that, and then I grant we put a sting in him that at his will he may do danger with.
 - ___ 5. Th' abuse of greatness is when it disjoins remorse from power.
 - ___ 6. And, to speak truth of Caesar, I have not known when his affection swayed more than his reason.
 - ___ 7. But 'tis a common proof that lowliness is young ambition's ladder, whereto the climber-upward turns his face; but, when he once attains the upmost round, he then unto the ladder turns his back, looks in the clouds, scorning the base degrees by which he did ascend.
 - ___ 8. So Caesar may.
9. Does Brutus' soliloquy contain more facts or opinions and generalizations? Do you think his conclusion is based more on facts or on opinions and generalizations?

Questions:

1. Which two men speak with their wives during this act?

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2. What does Lucius find upon the window sill?

3. Who do the conspirators decide to *not* kill? Why?

4. What three occurrences or events does Calphurnia interpret to mean that Caesar should not go to the Senate?

Analysis:

5. A *soliloquy* is a speech a character makes when he or she is alone on stage. A soliloquy often is used to provide background information or express what the character is thinking. Review Brutus' soliloquy at the beginning of Act 2, scene 1. What does this soliloquy reveal about Brutus?

6. In Act 1, scene 3, Casca says of Brutus to Cassius:

O, [Brutus] sits high in all the people's hearts,
And that which would appear offense in us
His countenance, like richest alchemy,
Will change to virtue and to worthiness.

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How is this high regard that people have for Brutus demonstrated by a particular person at the end of Act 2, scene 1? In what way does the person demonstrate his faith in Brutus?

7. Paraphrase Brutus' reasoning for why Caesar must be killed (Act 2, scene 1, lines 10–36).

8. Does Brutus give a convincing argument for killing Caesar? Citing specific examples from the text, explain why you did or did not find Brutus' argument convincing.

9. Early in Act 2, scene 1, Lucius brings a letter to Brutus. What does the letter say? How does Brutus interpret the letter? Do the contents of the letter justify Brutus' interpretation of them?

10. Review the discussion the conspirators have about contacting Cicero [Act 2, scene 1, lines 152–166 (“But what of Cicero?”)]. What does this reveal about their methods and motives in gathering support for their actions?

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11. After the conspirators arrive at Brutus' house, there is a short section in which Cassius takes Brutus aside to speak with him and the other characters discuss the dawn. This passage [Act 2, scene 1, lines 111–122 (“Here lies the East”)] seems oddly disconnected from the rest of the action. Why do you think Shakespeare included this short, unconnected exchange at this point in the play? What broader or more symbolic point do you think Shakespeare may be trying to make about these characters?

12. List two other times, earlier in this act, in which a character cannot tell the day or time.

13. In Act 2, scene 2, what is Caesar's response when Calphurnia tells him of her fears and the events of the night, and when the augurers find no heart in the bull? What changes his mind? What does he decide to do after Decius Brutus arrives?

14. Why do you think Caesar refuses to let Decius tell the Senate that he is ill, but instead insists that he say “Caesar will not come”? What might this tell us about Caesar?

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Dig Deeper:

15. When a person is intent on doing right, it means the person has applied a moral and/or ethical measure to his actions and is trying to match his actions to the moral code. When a person is justified in his actions, it means that he had good reasons for committing them. Review Brutus' statements and musings throughout this act. Do you think Brutus' words and arguments demonstrate that he wants his actions to be *right*, or to be *justifiable*? Which is more important? See Proverbs 6:30, 31; Philippians 1:9–11; 1 Peter 1:15, 16.
16. At every opportunity, Cassius has flattered Brutus and reminded him that he is viewed as an honorable man. In Act 1, scene 2, Cassius tells Brutus that the best of Rome wish that he could see himself with their eyes, and then offers to be Brutus' mirror so Brutus can "discover" himself. In Act 2, scene 1, when Cassius and his friends meet Brutus in his garden, Cassius says of the men,

. . .and no man here
But honors you, and every one doth wish
You had but that opinion of yourself
Which every noble Roman bears of you.

Review Act 2, scene 1. Do you think Brutus believes he is honorable? How do his actions, particularly in the latter half of the scene, reflect his self-perception?

17. When Cassius suggests killing Mark Antony along with Caesar, Brutus objects because it will make their actions "seem too bloody." Review Brutus' argument for not killing Antony in Act 2, scene 1, lines 175–193 ("Our course will

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seem”). With what imagery does Brutus describe their plan to kill Caesar? What does this description reveal about how Brutus hopes others will view their actions?

18. In Act 2, scene 1, lines 152–153 (“But what of Cicero?”), Cassius suggests they approach Cicero about joining their conspiracy. What reasons does Metellus give for wanting Cicero to join them? What discussion does this parallel in Act 1? Explain how the two discussions are parallel passages.

19. What three proposals are put forth when the conspirators meet with Brutus [Act 2, scene 1, lines 123–205 (“Give me your hands”)]? Who proposes the ideas? Who opposes the ideas? What do you think this means?

20. What does Artemidorus mean when he says in Act 2, scene 3, “My heart laments that virtue cannot live out of the teeth of emulation”? What statement of Caesar’s does this parallel from Act 1, scene 2? Do you think Artemidorus’ statement is true?

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21. Review the actions and words of Portia in Act 2, scene 4. Why do you think she is so different from her portrayal in Act 2, scene 1? Why do you think Shakespeare inserts this scene at the end of Act 2? Compare her actions with those of Brutus and others and note the contrast between Portia in scene 4 and the conspirators with Caesar in scene 2.

22. Read 1 Timothy 3:2, 3, and Titus 1:6, 7. What is the first requirement Paul lists for spiritual leaders in the church? Why do you think Paul lists this qualification first? From what you have seen so far, are Brutus and the conspirators trying to achieve this qualification, or are they trying to achieve the *appearance* of this qualification? Support your answer with examples from the text.

23. Review Act 2, scene 2. How do you characterize Caesar from his words and actions in this scene? How does he compare in this scene with Cassius' descriptions of him in Act 1?

24. Compare Portia and Calphurnia: which seems to most genuinely love and care for her husband? Which seems the strongest and most willing to help her husband?

Optional Activities:

1. Review Brutus' soliloquy about Caesar in Act 2, scene 1, lines 10–36, and his discussion of Caesar at Act 2, scene 1, lines 175–193. Note the way in which Brutus describes Caesar in generalizations and metaphors. Discuss why Brutus does this—why he describes Caesar as a snake or a sacrifice rather than describing Caesar's specific wrongs as a man and leader? Do you see instances of that in current politics or disagreements between people?
2. We often hear that what a man does in private should not be dragged out into politics, and we should judge political leaders by their policies, not their character. Discuss this issue as a class, or form two teams to debate each side of the issue. Can a man be a good leader without having good moral character? Is it possible to find leaders who are above reproach? Should Christians demand that their political leaders be moral men and women?
3. Think about the characters you have met thus far in the play and choose actors or characters from current television shows or movies to represent these characters. For example, you might cast Jerry Seinfeld as Cassius and George Costanza as Casca, or you might cast John Wayne as Julius Caesar and Mel Gibson as Mark Antony. Explain why you cast the characters as you did.
4. An *anachronism* is someone or something that is presented outside of its proper, chronological, or historical place or time. In Act 2, Shakespeare places a sound or object that is a glaring anachronism. Research the thing that is out of its appropriate time and write a one-page paper describing the object's development through history and mentioning what the Romans actually would have used during their period in history. You may instead make a poster or bulletin board with pictures and short descriptions of its development.

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Answer Key

Act One

Vocabulary:

1. machinelike, laborer; 2. shoemaker, bungler; 3. envious, suspicious; 4. shiny, stared; 5. irritating, harming; 6. improper, impertinent; 7. grovel; 8. readily; 9. outfitted; 10. considered; 11. doomsaying; 12. interpret

Questions:

1. Flavius and Marullus object to the people celebrating Julius Caesar's triumph because Caesar did not bring back any tributes from foreign lands—his victory was over fellow Romans, the sons of Pompey, the former dictator of Rome.
2. The soothsayer tells Caesar to beware the ides of March.
3. The ides of March are March 15. The ides are the 15th day of March, May, July, or October or the 13th day of the other months in the ancient Roman calendar.
4. Answers will vary. Basically, Cassius' complaint boils down to, "I am as good as Caesar." He states that both he and Brutus are from families as noble as Caesar's and were raised under similar circumstances, he cites examples of Caesar being unable to swim through a tempest and of Caesar being sick with fever, and he says their names are as good as Caesar's.
5. Mark Antony three times offered a crown to Caesar, presumably offering to crown him king. Caesar refuses the crown three times.
6. After Antony offers him the crown, Caesar falls down in an epileptic fit.
7. Cassius tells Cinna to take several letters and put them in prominent places for Brutus to find. He wants Brutus to think that the people of Rome are petitioning him to act against Caesar.

Analysis:

8. The senators seem to be very suspicious, maybe even contemptuous toward Caesar. Flavius and Marullus berate the commoners for gathering to honor Caesar, Casca ridicules his appearance at the Lupercal, Cassius and his cohorts seek his downfall, and even his friend Brutus fears what he may do. On the other hand the Roman public seem to hold Caesar in high esteem. They gather to honor Caesar's triumph, they cheer when he is offered and refuses the crown.
9. Examples of personification include: scolding winds; ambitious oceans . . . rage; exalted with the threat'ning clouds; the world, too saucy with the gods, incenses them. Answers about pathetic fallacy will vary. There are enough examples to justify a positive answer, but they do not describe a single event or sequence, so a negative answer may be better justified.
10. Answers may vary; accept reasonable responses. *Brutus*: Cassius flatters Brutus but hints that he does not have the strength or courage to stand up to Caesar (though the *ancient* Brutus deposed a king). He implies that Caesar is bad for Rome without giving any specific arguments. First, Cassius gently chides Brutus for seeming to ignore or seem unhappy with him, then, while denying that he is a flatterer, he flatters Brutus by telling him how much the "best" people of Rome admire him. He appeals to his honor, then complains that Caesar is no better than the two of them, yet Caesar rules over them. He goes on at some length about the faults of Caesar, then laments that no one is "man enough" to stand up to Caesar and reminds Brutus that Brutus' ancestor was brave enough to dethrone a king. *Casca*: Cassius takes a very different approach with Casca; he seems to bully Casca, insinuate that he is weak and scared, then offers him a chance to "prove" himself. First Cassius tells how bravely he himself has been facing the strange storm, then he tells Casca that Casca does not have the courage of a common Roman. In fact, Cassius says, Caesar only rules because Romans have become weak like sheep. Cassius says he will take action, then wonders aloud if he has spoken out of turn before someone who may feel he should be under the control of Caesar (a bondman). At this Casca declares his willingness to follow Cassius wherever he will lead ("I will set this foot of mine as far as who goes farthest"). Cassius sets himself up as fearless, acts contemptuously toward Casca, implies Casca is a coward and willing to be a slave, then offers him a way to appear brave and decisive by joining Cassius, even though Casca still does not exactly know what Cassius intends to do.
11. Answers will vary, but in general the patricians treat the common people as if they are stupid, undisciplined, and need to be taken care of and directed. Flavius and Marullus, in scene 1, call them idle; naughty; saucy; "you blocks, you stones, you worse than senseless things!"; Casca, in scene 2, calls them "rabblement" and "ragtag," and describes them with "sweaty nightcaps and . . . stinking breaths"; Cassius, in scene 3, calls the Roman people "sheep," "hinds," "weak straws," "trash," "rubbish," and "offal."

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12. Answers may vary. At the very least, Casca and Cassius believe that the people of Rome will view their actions as an offense, and they need Brutus and his reputation of honesty and honor to make them look honorable. It may be argued that they recognize the lack of honor in their actions, and they seek to give their plans the appearance of honor by gaining the support of Brutus.

13. Answers will vary. *Summary of First Anecdote:* Caesar challenged Cassius to swim in a stormy river, but could not make it and needed Cassius' help or he would have drowned. *Summary of Second Anecdote:* He had a fever in Spain and was very weak and called for water. *Statement:* Cassius is telling Brutus that Caesar is no better than either of them and has no more right to rule than they do. *Evidence:* Answers may vary, but Cassius provides little other actual evidence, so it appears that Cassius is using anecdotal evidence to try to prove his point. He tries to assert that, because Caesar could not swim better than Cassius and is subject to fever, Caesar should not have a higher position than they.

14. Answers may vary. The paraphrase should be similar to: "Yes, it is a strange [weird, abnormal] time. But people will twist the meanings of things to support what they already believe [or interpret them to mean what they want them to mean], no matter what the truth is." The statement may be foreshadowing Cassius; within a very few lines we see Cassius doing exactly as Cicero says—he starts to interpret the night to mean that world is chaotic because of Caesar. The statement is ironic because we have seen Caesar interpret the seer's words as madness, and then we see Cassius interpret the night as the blight of Caesar. It may be ironic in a broader sense also: if people interpret signs and portents any way they wish, then such signs may be ultimately useless as warnings.

15. In Act 1, scene 3, lines 65–81, Cassius implies that all the strange sights are a sign from heaven and a warning that Caesar has disrupted the natural order of things ("heaven hath infused them with these spirits to make them instruments of fear and warning unto some monstrous state"). The statement is ironic because Cicero, just a few lines before, has said to Casca, "But men may construe things after their fashion, clean from the purpose of the things themselves." In other words, men will interpret these things to make them mean whatever they want them to mean. Cassius is doing just that.

16. Answers may vary. Cassius is telling Casca that if Caesar is made king, he will kill himself ("But life, being weary of these worldly bars, never lacks power to dismiss itself"). The irony is that Cassius really has no intention of killing himself, he wishes to kill Caesar.

Dig Deeper:

17. These verses tell us that if someone sins against us, we should discuss it with him. If the issue is not resolved, we should take others with us to resolve it, and if this fails, we should bring the issue before the church. If the person refuses to listen to the church, he should be put out of the church. The procedure is similar to the requirement of two witnesses (Deuteronomy 19:15 and 1 Timothy 5:19), which protects against false witness and grudges, but it also provides opportunity for correction within the larger community—in other words, one person or a small group may feel offended by a perceived wrong, but the larger group may mediate the issue, show the aggrieved group their error, or help in the furtherance of discipline. This procedure is logical in most groups or organizations for the reasons stated. It adds the increased influence of more people at each step and increases the likelihood of self-correction as more people and greater perspective is added. Answers about Brutus and Cassius will vary. It appears that they have not attempted to bring their concerns to Caesar, and they appear to be relying on secrecy as they discuss their concerns and plans. They will not bring their concerns before either the Senate or Caesar. However, in the political climate of Rome at the time, it should be noted that publicly challenging or confronting a rival in power could have costly, sometimes deadly, consequences.

18. Answers may vary. Cassius must believe that he and his plans are *not* noble. He says that Brutus *is* noble, but that he can shift Brutus away from his natural inclination. If Brutus is noble and Cassius is going to "seduce" him and change him ("wrought from that it is disposed") then Cassius is admitting that he is moving Brutus *away* from what is noble.

19. Cassius says Brutus should stay with "noble minds" so he will not be led astray, and the verses say the same thing in various ways. The Proverbs verses say we can be strongly influenced by our companions, either toward wisdom or toward wickedness, foolishness, and violence. The Corinthians verse tells us "Do not be misled: 'Bad company corrupts good character'"; and the Hebrews passage encourages Christians to meet together, encourage each other, and spur each other to good.

20. Answers may vary. Cassius and the others want Brutus' support for the reason stated by Casca: "he sits high in all the people's heart, and that which would appear offense in us his countenance, like richest alchemy, will change to virtue and to worthiness." In other words, "the people respect Brutus, and having him on our side will make our actions look good." They want Brutus to join them so their actions will look better in the sight of the people, not to bolster their strength or to make use of his opinion. As noted at the end of scene 2, Cassius is intent on changing his opinion to match theirs or at least to get him to go along with their actions.