**Julius Caesar** is a five-act tragedy by the English dramatist William Shakespeare. It exploits the Elizabethan fascination for ancient Rome, particularly the life and death of the powerful military and political leader Julius Caesar. Julius Caesar is an early play. It was one of the tragedies that he wrote during his second period of artistic development and was probably written and first performed in 1599. It was not published until 1623.

As Shakespeare did in his other Roman dramas, he relied heavily on the ancient Greek writer Plutarch's Lives in an English translation made in 1579 by the English author Sir Thomas North from a French version. The play takes place in ancient Rome and concerns events before and after the assassination of the Roman ruler Julius Caesar. Despite its title, the play's central character is not Caesar but Brutus, a Roman general and Caesar's best friend. Brutus reluctantly joins a plot led by Cassius. The plotters plan to murder Caesar, and Brutus joins it because he believes Rome's safety requires Caesar's death. Caesar has already been made dictator of Rome, and the conspirators fear that he might be crowned king. The plotters attack Caesar in the Roman Senate, and each of them stabs him in turn. The last to strike is Brutus. Caesar's last words are "Et tu, Brute? [You too, Brutus?] Then fall, Caesar!" Brutus defends the assassination to a crowd of Romans. But he unwisely allows the clever and eloquent Mark Antony to deliver a funeral speech over Caesar's body that begins with the famous line "Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears." Antony tells the people, "I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him." He then describes the plotters with heavy sarcasm as "honourable men." At the same time, Antony points out Caesar's virtues and thus gradually turns the crowd into a mob ready to burn and kill to avenge Caesar's death. The plotters are forced to flee Rome.

Mark Antony leads an army that defeats the forces of the plotters at the Battle of Philippi, in northeastern Macedonia. At the end of the battle, Brutus and Cassius commit suicide. Over Brutus's corpse, Antony declares, "This was the noblest Roman of them all." Antony says that the other plotters killed Caesar out of envy, but only Brutus acted with "honest thought / And common good to all."

Julius Caesar has become a popular play because of its magnificent language and sharp character portraits. For example, Caesar tellingly describes the plotter Cassius as having a "lean and hungry look." But the real interest in Julius Caesarcenters on the character of Brutus. A thoughtful, withdrawn man, he is torn between his affection for Caesar and his strong sense of duty to the state.

"Julius Caesar." *World Book Student*. World Book, 2016. Web. 26 Sept. 2016.