Julius Caesar Act I

Words, Words, Words*

Questions and answers have been provided for you. Your job is to cite the lines from the play that corroborate the answers to the questions. Be sure to use the exact language in the line format presented. Line numbers are not necessary.

READING CHECK
1. What actions do the tribunes Flavius and Marullus take to restrain popular support of Caesar?
   They drive the commoners from the streets to keep them from celebrating Caesar's triumph, and they remove decorations from the statues of Caesar.

2. How are the tribunes punished?
   They are banished.

3. Why have Caesar and his attendants gathered in a public square near the Forum?
   They have come to watch the races.

4. What warning does Caesar receive?

5. What reason does Brutus give for not attending the games?
   He tells Cassius that he does not like games.

6. How did Cassius once save Caesar's life?
   Cassius once saved Caesar from drowning in the river Tiber.

7. What is Antony's opinion of Cassius?
   Antony tells Caesar that Cassius is a noble Roman and that he is well disposed toward Caesar.

8. Brutus and Cassius hear the crowd shout three times. What does the shouting mean?
   The people are happy because Caesar has rejected the crown that Antony has offered him.

9. On the night of the storm, what unnatural events does Casca report?
   He tells of a slave with his hand aflame, a lion in the streets, men on fire, and a screech owl that appeared in the marketplace during the day.

10. Whom does Cassius win over to the conspiracy at the end of the first act?
    He makes a convert of Casca.

FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION
1. The play begins with a humorous scene that provides important background information. a. How are the conflicting attitudes toward Caesar shown?
   The tribunes Flavius and Marullus, loyal to the memory of Pompey and critical of Caesar, try to disband the groups of commoners who have taken the day off to celebrate Caesar's triumphant return to Rome.

   b. What information about Caesar and Pompey is revealed?
   Caesar has triumphed over Pompey's forces.
2. The commoners (the mob) are a major force in the play. a. What does Scene 1 tell you about how fickle the mob is in its loyalty?
Marullus complains that the mob once thrilled to the sight of Pompey; now it just as eagerly celebrates Caesar's victory over Pompey's sons.

b. How does it show that the mob is easily influenced by people in authority?
Obviously, the crowd's allegiance shifts instantly to the person who comes into power. They exit here, seemingly without objecting to the tribune's orders.

3. In Scene 2, Brutus says that he is at war with himself. What are the two sides of the "war" that is going on in Brutus' mind?
Although Brutus loves Caesar, he does not want him to be made king, to become more powerful, and possibly a tyrant. He reveals that he is already considering the notions Cassius hints at.

4. In the early part of Scene 2, Cassius attempts to get Brutus to join the conspiracy against Caesar. a. Why doesn't he ask Brutus directly?
Cassius is cautious and devious. He knows Brutus' loyalty to Caesar and so knows that he is more likely to be successful if he slowly works Brutus around to his point of view.

b. What tactics does he use? Use separate lines for each numbered part.
Cassius first complains that 1) Brutus has not been friendly of late and 2) flatters Brutus by telling him that others hold him in the highest regard. 3) He appeals to Brutus' sense of honor and concern for the public good and 4) tells Brutus that Caesar is no god but a mere mortal with a 5) feeble temperament who 6) holds unnatural power over others. Cassius speaks more boldly and 7) tells Brutus that he is Caesar's equal and 8) that Caesar has grown dangerous and too powerful.

5a. What is Caesar's emotional state when he reenters in Scene 2?
He is angry, according to Brutus' observation.

b. What do you think he means by the word hungry?
Students' interpretation of hungry may vary, though it is clearly meant metaphorically. Cassius is hungry for power or possessions, for whatever he does not have. Note that Caesar's speeches about Cassius reveal Caesar to be an accurate, perceptive judge of character. Caesar's character sketch, at this point in the play, helps the audience understand Cassius and his motives.

6a. What personal defects and weaknesses of Caesar does Shakespeare emphasize in Act One?
Shakespeare reveals the following weaknesses: Caesar is superstitious though he claims not to be (wanting Antony to touch the barren Calpurnia as he races by). He suffers from epilepsy and deafness in one ear. Cassius reports that he grew tired while swimming and that he groaned "as a sick girl" when he had a fever.

b. Do you think these frailties make him unsuitable as a leader? Explain. Answers will vary.
Apparently, Caesar has been a strong soldier and leader, and the physical defects do not make him unsuitable for a leadership position.

7a. In Scene 2, how eager is Brutus to continue his conversation with Cassius?
He is willing, although not eager, to continue the conversation. Brutus puts Cassius off with a promise to hear him out at some future time.

b. Brutus' attitude has changed. Why?
Casca tells the story of Caesar's refusing a crown.
8a. What does Cassius do and say that makes us suspicious of his motives and his cause?
He does not ask Brutus directly to join the conspiracy; thus, he must have reasons for thinking that Brutus will not find the cause just or honorable. He even goes so far as to send Brutus anonymous letters. Cassius seems to be extremely envious of Caesar's power.

b. Do his actions seem to support Caesar's opinion of him?
Students will probably agree that Cassius' actions prove Caesar's analysis of his character to be quite accurate. Caesar does think he is dangerous, and indeed he is.

9. In what ways is Cassius the opposite of Brutus?
Brutus is honest, noble, idealistic, and full of integrity. Cassius is devious, opportunistic, practical, and shrewd.

10a. Scene 3 begins with a frightening storm. What attitude does each of the following characters have toward the storm and its causes: Cicero, Casca, and Cassius?
Cicero is unmoved by the storm and thinks that natural events are open to misinterpretation. Casca is fearful and thinks that either there is war in heaven or that the gods are angry and are sending destruction on the world. Cassius thinks that the storm is a sign from heaven to act against Caesar.

b. How does Cassius use the storm to support his political views?
Cassius is clearly against Caesar's continued rule; to substantiate his own feelings about Caesar, he interprets the storm as divine sanction for his views.

11. In Scene 3 Cassius sounds out Casca on joining the conspiracy, just as in Scene 2 he sounded out Brutus. a. How is his approach to Casca different from his approach to Brutus?
Cassius knows that Casca is blunt - a man of action - rather than a man of thought like Brutus. Where he flatters Brutus, he shames and almost insults Casca, suggesting that perhaps Casca is willing to be Caesar's slave.

b. How is it similar?
In both cases Cassius has struck vulnerable points - the honor of Brutus and the commonness of Casca, which Casca wishes to throw off.

12. Why is it necessary to the conspirators that Brutus join them?
Everyone, including Caesar, holds Brutus in great esteem. He is noble, honorable, trusting, idealistic, a man who does not seek personal gain. He would lend respectability and authority to the conspiracy.

Cite lines from Scene 3 that show their (the conspirators) attitudes toward Brutus.

13. What is the mood of Scene 3?
The scene is ominous and sinister, full of portents of the evil and violence to come. The stage effects of thunder and lightning help create the mood, and the descriptions of supernatural powers at work are calculated to fill the audience with awe and fear.

* from *Hamlet*, scene ii
Polonius: What do you read, my lord?
Hamlet: Words, words, words.