

Julius caesar, act ii, scene 1: a lesson is dramatic effectiveness

[History](#), [Ancient History](#)



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Act 2 scene 1 of Julius Caesar, from lines 1-69, is terribly important as it marks a turning point in the play. The two characters appearing are Brutus and his servant, Lucius. Brutus, having had the notion of murdering Caesar planted in his mind by Cassius, ponders and explores the idea here and, through self-applied rhetoric combined with the effect of Cassius' scrolls praising his nobility, Brutus decides to take action and kill Caesar. The passage is extremely effective in dramatic terms: although Brutus is alone for much of the scene, with great potential for ensuing dullness and boredom, Shakespeare maintains the drama throughout and sustains audience interest through a variety of means. The line, 'I cannot, by the progress of the stars, give guess how near to day', provides a reminder of the storm and odd happenings of the night, which signify both the political turmoil of Rome and the inner turmoil of Brutus; whether or not public interest is more important than private friendship. The storm itself, at the discretion of the director, would no doubt be created using theatre lighting and sound, adding to the excitement and creating tension. Brutus orders his servant Lucius to fetch a torch, and then begins persuading himself that Caesar must die with the words 'it must be by his death'. This simple, monosyllabic phrase clearly indicates Brutus' intentions and, though he debates the matter in the course of his soliloquy, the final outcome is again highlighted in a six-word, monosyllabic statement, 'And kill him in the shell'. These two phrases ensure that audience members are not lost among the maelstrom of poetic language, and maintain a clear sense of plot direction while allowing the incorporation of excitement and passion in Brutus' self-persuading speech. The speech maintains interest through the use of poetic

and richly descriptive language, using a variety of metaphors for Caesar including a 'serpent's egg', which, if the man were crowned, would hatch and potentially cause great harm to Rome. Such powerful poetic imagery is used both to give information about Caesar's sense of self-importance while enthralling the audience. When Lucius re-enters with the torch, he brings a paper, which, unbeknownst to him, Cassius has thrown in to the window, purporting to be from a Roman citizen supporting Brutus, which helps to further persuade him to the cause of conspiring against Caesar. The letter, drawing on the memory of Brutus' ancestor who drove the dictator Tarquin from Rome, urges Brutus to 'speak, strike, redress,' and rid Rome of its new dictator. The entrance of Lucius and the presence of the scroll breaks up Brutus' speeches keep the audience from boredom at his potentially (though this would differ according to actor and direction) insipid language. Brutus' pondering is truncated when Lucius announces that 'March is wasted fifteen days', the dramatic interjection providing a reminder to the reader of the Soothsayer's warning 'Beware the Ides of March' of I. II 18. It creates a sense of anticipation for the audience of what is to come and heightens Brutus' vexation, though it seems also to be a factor in determining him against Caesar. The mood of the piece then becomes increasingly menacing and sinister, especially with the entrance of the conspirators in the following section. The sense of expectancy of the cadaverous deed to come builds right through from here to the moment of Caesar's death, and the audience becomes gripped as the tension onstage mounts. The stage direction 'Knock within' provides a masterful dramatic transition to the next section of the scene, and as Lucius is sent offstage to see who knocks, the audience is left

to ponder on the nature of a caller so late at night; again a deepening sense of sinister tension is heightened for the audience, and it is possible that, during the ensuing speech, the Director would have Brutus noticeably vexed. Brutus' final speech in the passage is a summation of the section, and is employed in order to aid any audience members who may not have fully grasped the meaning of the primary speeches with their poetic language. The passage highlights Brutus' inner turmoil with the emphasis, through irregular word-placement of the words ' I have not slept'. The macabre nature of the deed which he has persuaded himself must be done is underlined using language such as ' dreadful', ' phantasma' and ' hideous', and Brutus describes his own state of mind as torn once again: ' The genius and moral instruments are then in council'. ' Genius' refers to his soul and ' mortal instruments' to his body, again indicating the nature of his mental turmoil. In a clever and intricate use of language, Brutus implies that the consequences of his actions will affect the empire using the word ' kingdom' and, concluding his self-persuading argument in a brilliantly poetic, but notably implied, summation, the final word of his speech is ' insurrection', indicating to the audience once again that he intends to create an uprising in Rome. Shakespeare, through his masterful use of language, stage effects and characters, manipulates the audience throughout the passage to instill mounting tension and anticipation, maintaining a thickening plot line while retaining audience interest. All of these factors combined make this section from William Shakespeare's Julius Caesar, II. I 1-69, so very dramatically effective.