

Julius Caesar

Act 2

by William Shakespeare

Pre-Reading Vocabulary Practice

Optional Post-Reading Quiz Included

Practice words: constancy, emulation, insurrection, lowliness, mischievous, remorse, semblance, spurn, subtle, whet

PRE-READING ACTIVITY

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Caution: share only if self-checking

OPTIONAL POST-READING QUIZ

Vocabulary in Context	4
Answer Key — In Context	5

Caution: do not share with students

About the Pre-Reading Activity (open-dictionary; ungraded or completion grade):

Students preview 10 words from the upcoming reading, each in a sentence that supports understanding. They choose the best meaning from 3 choices.

About the Optional Post-Reading Quiz (use after reading, or skip):

Same words, now in real excerpts from the text, with questions that build reading and analytical skills.

Vocabulary Sections for this Play:

Section 1 · Act 1 · Caesar's triumph in the streets of Rome

Section 2 · Act 2 · Brutus alone in his orchard at night

Section 3 · Act 3 · Caesar arrives at the Capitol

Section 4 · Act 4 · New rulers divide power in Rome

Section 5 · Act 5 · The armies meet on the plains of Philippi

Bold = this section. Other sections are available at verbalworkout.com.



verbalworkout.com
(all resources free)

Vocabulary Preview

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Name _____ Date _____ Period _____

Read each prompt. Then choose the best meaning for the bold word.

1. It took real **constancy** to follow the same hard plan for years.

- A. quiet confidence
- B. firmness of purpose
- C. great patience

2. A bitter **emulation** grew between the two clerks competing for the same promotion.

- A. shared ambition
- B. envious rivalry
- C. admiring imitation

3. The harsh new taxes sparked an **insurrection** across the province.

- A. an economic collapse
- B. a revolt against authority
- C. a heated debate

4. With great **lowliness**, she thanked everyone but herself for the award.

- A. a humble manner
- B. quiet shyness
- C. calm patience

5. The **mischievous** rumor ruined her reputation overnight.

- A. harmful or injurious
- B. false and untrue
- C. playful and naughty

6. A ruler without **remorse** will crush anyone who stands in his way.

- A. guilt for past wrongs
- B. fear of punishment
- C. mercy or compassion

7. He kept a **semblance** of calm even as panic rose inside him.

- A. outward appearance
- B. a small amount
- C. a faint memory

8. He would **spurn** any gift that came with strings attached.

- A. criticize harshly
- B. inspect carefully
- C. reject with contempt

9. The **subtle** merchant tricked his rivals out of every deal.

- A. soft or delicate
- B. bold or daring
- C. crafty or cunning

10. A clever opening scene can **whet** a reader's curiosity.

- A. sharpen or stir up
- B. puzzle or confuse
- C. shape or direct

Reading Helpers

(Not quizzed — helpful for this text.)

Erebus — in Greek mythology, a place of primordial darkness in the underworld
augurers — in ancient Rome, priests who interpreted omens to foretell events

ANSWER KEY

Vocabulary Preview

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#	KEY
1	B
2	B
3	B
4	A
5	A
6	C
7	A
8	C
9	C
10	A

Vocabulary in Context

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Name _____ Date _____ Period _____ Score _____ / 10

Read each excerpt carefully. Then choose the best answer to each question.

1 “I know no personal cause to spurn at him,
But for the general.”

As it is used in the passage, the word “spurn” most nearly suggests that Brutus has no personal cause to...

- A. scorn or reject Caesar
- B. urge Caesar onward
- C. openly challenge Caesar

2 “Th’ abuse of greatness is when it disjoins Remorse
from power.”

It can reasonably be inferred that Brutus fears power becomes dangerous once it is cut off from...

- A. reason and judgment
- B. mercy and compassion
- C. loyalty to Rome

3 “lowliness is young ambition’s ladder,
Whereto the climber-upward turns his face;”

The author most likely includes the image of the ladder in order to...

- A. praise sincere humility
- B. warn against rising too fast
- C. cast humility as ambition’s tool

4 “think him as a serpent’s egg,
Which, hatched, would, as his kind, grow
mischievous,
And kill him in the shell.”

In context, the word “mischievous” emphasizes...

- A. the charm that wins him friends
- B. the deadly harm Caesar could do
- C. the playful pranks he enjoys

5 “Since Cassius first did whet me against Caesar,
I have not slept.”

Which statement is best supported by the passage?

- A. Cassius’s urging has cost Brutus sleep
- B. Brutus only lately met Cassius
- C. Brutus means to warn Caesar

6 “the state of man,
Like to a little kingdom, suffers then
The nature of an insurrection.”

The author most likely compares a man to a “little kingdom” in order to...

- A. praise the kingdom’s calm order
- B. show Rome’s political unrest
- C. depict a revolt within Brutus

7 “if thou path, thy native semblance on”

The passage most strongly suggests that Brutus is warning the conspiracy not to...

- A. trust its powerful enemies
- B. reveal its true appearance
- C. delay its secret meeting

8 “And let our hearts, as subtle masters do,
Stir up their servants to an act of rage”

In the passage, “subtle masters” are best understood as people who are...

- A. cunning and calculating
- B. gentle and merciful
- C. faint and hesitant

9 “virtue cannot live
Out of the teeth of emulation.”

It can reasonably be inferred that the speaker believes virtue is endangered by...

- A. envious rivalry
- B. open flattery
- C. honest competition

10 “O constancy, be strong upon my side;
Set a huge mountain ‘tween my heart and tongue.”

According to the passage, Portia calls on constancy in order to...

- A. win back her husband’s trust
- B. gain the strength to leave
- C. keep herself from revealing a secret

ANSWER KEY

Vocabulary in Context

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#	KEY	NOTE
1	A	
2	B	Here 'remorse' carries its older sense of mercy or compassion that restrains cruelty, not modern guilt.
3	C	
4	B	Here 'mischievous' carries its older, stronger sense of causing serious harm, not modern playful naughtiness.
5	A	Event comprehension. 'Whet' is figurative — literally to sharpen, here to stir up.
6	C	
7	B	
8	A	'Subtle' here means crafty or cunning, not the modern 'faint' or 'delicate.'
9	A	'Emulation' here means envious rivalry, not the modern sense of admiring imitation.
10	C	Character comprehension. Portia's 'constancy' is firmness of purpose — here, the resolve to keep silent.

Teacher Context: Act 2

In his orchard before dawn, Brutus resolves to act against Caesar and the conspirators gather to lay their plans. Portia begs her husband to share his trouble. At Caesar's house, Calphurnia's fearful dream nearly keeps him home until Decius reinterprets it and persuades him to go to the Senate.