



# YALE NATIONAL INITIATIVE

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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative  
2015 Volume II: Explaining Character in Shakespeare

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## **Convincing the Masses: Rhetoric in Julius Caesar**

Guide for Curriculum Unit 15.02.08, published September 2015  
by Jennifer Vermillion

Using *Julius Caesar* as a foundational text, high school students will be challenged to understand and employ the art of rhetoric, or persuasion. An awareness of the prevalence of rhetoric in advertising, politics and even daily life will be developed in hopes of developing critical thinking skills and an ability to self-advocate. Close reading of text and learning to analyze passages for rhetorical strategies will engender readers who approach text with a purpose, and recognize the ways in which authors develop their point of view. Critical thinking, strategic reading, and analytic writing skills will be honed prior to approaching *Julius Caesar*, at which time students will find themselves engaged in complex questions relating to the uses of rhetoric. Students will learn to recognize and appreciate the complexity of the language instead of feeling intimidated by it. The play lends itself to multiple interpretations of character owing to ambiguous language and therefore provides students with ample opportunities to develop their own opinions based upon textual evidence. Through close reading of specific soliloquies, monologues and passages, students will understand that rhetoric works to both embellish the text and develop characterization.

(Developed for English II, grade 2; recommended for English I-IV, grades 9-12)

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