



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

How Our Moral Views Shape Our Judgment of Characters in Julius Caesar

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In [*Julius Caesar*], there are no clear cut “bad” and “good” characters. The four main characters – Caesar, Brutus, Cassius and Antony – participate in a series of decisions that make it difficult to judge the character definitively as a whole. In fact, there may be no accurate judgment possible at all. For one thing, when we read a piece of literature, we bring with us a wealth of beliefs and experience that color our judgments and, ultimately, may alter the way we see text evidence – what evidence we assign value and what evidence we may even choose to ignore. At times, we may choose evidence selectively to support an interpretation that justifies our already existing ethical views.

This unit will ask ninth and tenth grade students to address the viewpoints they bring to the table and actively assess how those beliefs influence their interpretation of text evidence and how they can actively look for the evidence they may have overlooked in defense of their own belief. The unit promotes analysis by pursuing the question “when does loyalty expire?” and uses that frame to examine how the four main characters can be judged in different ways.

(Developed for English 1 PSP, grade 10; recommended for English, grades 9-12)

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