

Name _____



The Changing Crowd

In ancient Rome, the people's support was important for any leader. A ruler who pleased the people could stay in power, but if the crowd turned against them, they could be overthrown. In Julius Caesar, William Shakespeare shows how fickle the Roman people were—they easily changed their opinions based on who spoke to them. This suggests that political power is not always stable and can be influenced by persuasive words.

At the beginning of the play, the people cheer for Julius Caesar after he wins a battle against Pompey. They celebrate in the streets, forgetting that just a short time ago, they also cheered for Pompey. This shows that they are quick to change their loyalty based on success.

Later, after Caesar is assassinated, Brutus speaks to the crowd. He calmly explains that he and the other senators killed Caesar because they feared he would become a king and take away the people's freedom. At first, the crowd supports Brutus. They agree that he acted for the good of Rome and that Caesar was too ambitious.

But then Mark Antony speaks. Instead of attacking Brutus directly, he cleverly uses persuasion to make the people doubt Brutus' words. He repeatedly calls Brutus and the other senators "honorable men," but his tone makes the people question whether Brutus is truly honorable. Antony also shows Caesar's will, which promises money and land to the Roman people. He holds up Caesar's bloody cloak and describes the places where he was stabbed. This makes the crowd feel sympathy for Caesar, and they begin to turn against Brutus.

Within minutes, the same people who supported Brutus now riot against him. They become so angry that they burn houses and attack anyone they believe supported Caesar's murder. This sudden change shows how easily the Roman people are influenced by speeches rather than thinking for themselves.

Shakespeare's portrayal of the Roman people suggests that political power is fragile. A leader may be popular one day and hated the next, all because of the power of words. This idea is still relevant today—public opinion can change quickly, depending on who tells the most convincing story.