*Julius Caesar*, William Shakespeare

Background Information

Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Period: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_

BACKGROUND:

For centuries, Romans debated and even fought civil wars while trying to decide whether a monarchy, a republic or a dictatorship was the best form of government. Until 509 B.C., Rome was a monarchy, but, in that year, the Brutus family evicted Tranquinuis Superbus from the throne and Rome was established as a republic.

By 100 B.C., Rome was a moderate democracy in form; in actual practice, the Senate was ruling Rome. In 60 B.C., a triumvirate (a three-man rule) of Caesar, Crassus, and Pompey was formed to govern Rome.

In 58 B.C., Caesar was made governor of part of Gaul, and at the age of 44 began his military career. During the next ten years, he proceeded to conquer all of Gaul. Roman Gaul consisted of an area of provincial rule in the Roman Empire, in modern day France, Belgium, Luxembourg, and western Germany.

After Crassus was killed in battle, trouble began to develop between Pompey and Caesar. Pompey, jealous of Caesar’s popularity, persuaded the Senate to order Caesar to disband his army and return to Rome. But Caesar invaded Rome and made himself absolute ruler of Rome. Meanwhile, Pompey fled to Greece. Caesar defeated Pompey’s army and Pompey fled to Egypt where he was later murdered.

Three years after Caesar defeated Pompey’s army, Caesar defeated Pompey’s two sons. By now, Caesar had been made dictator for life. Thus, as Shakespeare begins his play with Caesar returning in victory from Spain, Caesar was the undisputed leader and master of the entire Roman world.

HERO:

Just as *Romeo and Juliet* was a tragedy, so is *Julius Caesar*. Unlike *Romeo and Juliet* where the title characters were the heroes of the play, Julius Caesar is not the hero. The hero in this play is Brutus, a noble man who truly believes his actions are for the good of his country. Brutus dominates much of the play, and perhaps the title should be *The Tragedy of Marcus Brutus.*

SETTING:

The setting is Rome, Italy, part of the continent of Europe, and it is situated along the Tiber River.

LIFE IN ROME:

There were two classes of people in Rome. The people were either rich or poor. The upper class, rich were called Patricians and the poor, lower class were called Plebeians.

POLITICS:

*Julius Caesar* is a political play, and political issues are the root of the tragic conflict in the play. It is a play about a general who would be king, but who, because of his own pride and ambition, meets an untimely death. Shakespeare seems to be saying that good government must be based on morality. In this respect the play has relevance to the politics of the modern world.

THE FOCUS OF THE PLAY:

This play focuses on those men who were responsible for the assassination of Caesar and their ill-fated attempt to control Rome.

TIMELINE:

Shakespeare compresses the actual historical time of three years into a period of six days.