

A Glossary of Dramatic Terms

Directions: Review the definitions of the following literary terms, which will be useful in your study of *Julius Caesar*.

Act—a main division of a drama (Shakespeare’s plays consist of five acts subdivided into scenes.)

Alliteration—the repetition of the same initial consonant sound in two or more consecutive or closely associated words (Example: “For I have neither wit, nor words, nor worth . . .”)

Allusion—a reference to a literary or historical person or event to explain a present situation (Example: “And Caesar’s spirit, ranging for revenge, / With Ate by his side come hot from hell . . .” Ate is the Greek goddess of vengeance and discord.)

Aside—a brief remark made by a character and intended to be heard by the audience or by one other character, but not by other characters

Atmosphere—the mood established by events, places, or situations (Example: “If you have tears, prepare to shed them now . . . / This was the most unkindest cut of all.”)

Comic relief—a humorous scene or speech in a serious drama which is meant to provide relief from emotional intensity and, by contrast, to heighten the seriousness of the story

Foreshadowing—a hint of what is to come, often used to keep the audience in a state of expectancy

Imagery—words or phrases that appeal to the senses (Figurative language may use images, but not all images are figures of speech.)

Irony—a contrast between what is and what appears to be; types include verbal, in which a character says one thing and means another, and dramatic, in which the audience knows what the characters do not

Metaphor—a figure of speech that implies or states a comparison between two unlike things which are similar in some way; does not use *like* or *as* (Example: “These growing feathers pluck’d from Caesar’s wing / will make him fly an ordinary pitch . . .”)

Oxymoron—a combination of two contradictory terms for the sake of emphasis (Example: “Cowards die many times before their deaths.”)

Personification—a figure of speech in which human qualities are attributed to inanimate objects, animals, or ideas (Example: “O conspiracy, / Sham’st thou to show thy dangerous brow by night.”)

Rhetoric—the art of persuasion; may include such devices as parallel structure, antithesis, repetition, and paradox

Scene—a small unit of an act of a play in which there is no shift of locale or time

Simile—a figure of speech that states a comparison between two essentially unlike things; usually phrased with *like* or *as* (Example: “. . . he doth bestride the narrow world / Like a Colossus . . .”)

Soliloquy—a speech given by a character alone on the stage to let the audience know what the character is thinking and feeling

Tragedy—a type of drama of human conflict which ends in defeat and suffering (Often the main character, usually dignified and noble, has a tragic flaw, such as weakness of character or wrong judgment, which leads to his or her destruction. Sometimes the conflict is with forces beyond the control of the character, such as fate or evil in the world.)