

Julius Caesar – Sample Answers

2009 Junior Certificate Examination

1. Choose a scene from a play you have studied where a particular mood or atmosphere is created.

(i) Describe the mood or atmosphere in this scene. Support your answer with reference to the text. (15)

(ii) How does the playwright create this mood or atmosphere? Aspects you may wish to consider could include: setting, lighting, stage directions, music, sound or dialogue. (15)

Part One

Note: It doesn't matter what scene you choose here. There are a number of options. You could look at the assassination of Caesar, the conversation between Brutus and Portia or the quarrel scene in the tent. I have opted for the quarrel scene as it is one of the most famous scenes in any of Shakespeare's plays because it contains so many different elements.

Plan:

Atmosphere – great tension, a scene which never allows the audience to relax.

- Bitter fight between two friends
- Pathos of Portia's death
- Ominous and frightening appearance of ghost

Sample Answer:

(i) Describe the mood or atmosphere in this scene.

Support your answer with reference to the text. (15)

The play I have studied for my Junior Certificate is William Shakespeare's tragedy 'Julius Caesar'. The scene which I have chosen to discuss is Act 4, Scene 3: the Quarrel Scene in Brutus'

tent. The atmosphere throughout this scene is one of great tension. The audience is never allowed to relax as events move from bitter fighting to heartbreaking admission to ghostly apparition.

If you are preparing a specific scene or scenes for use in a JC answer, then it is advisable to know the act and scene number.

This is the thesis, and every point made in the rest of the answer will support it.

The tension is introduced with the bitter row between Cassius and Brutus.

While they are ostensibly arguing about money, the stress between the pair stems from far more than that. Their differences in philosophy and personality are coming to the fore, along with their

individual blind spots. Brutus insults Cassius, calling him a man with 'an itching palm' because he accepts bribes, and saying haughtily that he, Brutus, would rather 'be a dog, and bay at the moon, / Than such a Roman'. Cassius is understandably incensed at this treatment at the hands of his friend, ally and brother-in-law, and threatens to harm

The highlighted phrases directly relate to the question. Every point must be relevant to the question.

Brutus, 'Urge me no more, I shall forget myself; / Have a mind upon your health; tempt me no further'. Brutus accuses Cassius of denying him money to pay his legions, a charge which Cassius hotly denies. The tension increases until Cassius, in a dramatic gesture, asks Brutus to kill him rather than allow him to live in such misery.

There is a momentary break in the tension here as Brutus repents of his earlier anger and tells Cassius that the fault is partly his: 'When I spoke... I was ill-tempered too'. Cassius instantly grasps his hand in friendship, but before the audience can relax, a new note of tension is introduced. Brutus tells Cassius that the reason for his bad temper is the news of Portia's suicide. The pathos of this revelation ensures that the audience is once again caught up in the drama of the scene.

'Pathos' is a quality which causes the audience to feel sympathy or sadness.

The final moment of tension in this scene is the appearance of the 'monstrous apparition that appears out of the shadows of the tent to make Brutus' 'blood cold'. The audience is on tenterhooks wondering what Caesar's ghost will have to say. His ominous warning to Brutus that he will see him 'at Philippi' is a chilling one. Brutus rushes to wake those around him in order to see if they have seen the ghost, but none of them have. The audience is left wondering if the ghost is real or a figment of Brutus' guilty conscience.

All in all, this is a scene which is rightly renowned for its high drama and tension. It is little wonder that Samuel Taylor Coleridge praised it as a work of dramatic genius.

19th century poet, literary critic and philosopher. If you don't think you will get his name right, or you have no idea who he is, don't include this sentence in your conclusion.

(ii) How does the playwright create this mood or atmosphere? Aspects you may wish to consider could include: setting, lighting, stage directions, music, sound or dialogue. (15)

Note: Although some questions give you scope to discuss various productions you have seen, this question does not. It clearly states that you should discuss how the playwright (Shakespeare, not a director) creates the mood or atmosphere. You must read the question carefully.

Plan:.

- Beginning the scene mid-fight creates tension
- Shock of Portia's death conveyed through Brutus' bleak pronouncement
- Appearance of ghost is brief and confusing

Answer:

In Shakespeare's time, audiences said they were going to 'hear a play' rather than 'see a play'. The distinction is telling. For the audience of the time – unused to elaborate staging and setting – the language of the play was essential to the creation of atmosphere. As well as the language, Shakespeare also used the supernatural to heighten tension and add drama to certain plays. Both of these elements of his craft are used to great effect in this scene.

The first thing we notice about this scene is that it begins mid-argument. This creates an immediate sense of tension. The differences between Cassius and Brutus become clear as they trade angry, abrupt accusations and threats. Their short exchanges are punctuated with exclamation marks or question marks, adding to the sense of tension in this scene. The trading of insults and outraged questions shows just how far apart these friends have grown.

The highlighted sections directly answer the question, which is HOW did Shakespeare create this sense of tension?

Brutus responds to Cassius' threat with a dismissive **'Away, slight man!'** and Cassius replies with an incredulous **'Is't possible?'**

Although this row eventually burns out as the absurdity of it dawns on the two men, Brutus' revelation of Portia's death creates new tension. His stark manner as he breaks the news is shocking, not just to Cassius, but also to the audience. Rather than couching the fact in euphemistic language, Brutus simply says **'Portia is dead'**. Cassius is appalled to hear this, as is the audience, but once again Brutus repeats the bleak fact: **'She is dead'**. His description of the manner of her death – she swallowed hot coals – is horrifying.

The final way in which Shakespeare creates tension in this scene is through the appearance of Caesar's ghost. Its appearance is fleeting and confusing. Is it real or is it a manifestation of Brutus' guilty conscience? In this case, much is left up to the director. The ghost says little other than to warn Brutus that he will see him again **'at Philippi'**. Whatever way the audience views the ghost: as a figment of Brutus' tortured conscience or as a real spirit from the netherworld, its appearance in this scene adds greatly to the sense of tension that makes this scene so memorable.



2013 Junior Certificate Examination

Choose a scene from a play you have studied that has a strong mood or atmosphere.

(a) Describe what takes place in your chosen scene and identify the mood or atmosphere created. Support your answer with reference to the play. (10)

(b) Imagine you are directing your chosen scene on stage. Explain some of the decisions that you would make in order to create the mood or atmosphere successfully. Support your answer with reference to the play. (20)

Part One

Note: The answer used in Part (a) of the 2009 question would serve equally well here. It is, perhaps, a bit long for 10 marks, so I have shortened it a little. However, if you are lucky enough to have a prepared answer which fits the question asked, then you will find you can write it out far more quickly than if you have to write one from scratch.

Plan:

Atmosphere – great tension, a scene which never allows the audience to relax.

- Bitter fight between two friends
- Pathos of Portia's death
- Ominous and frightening appearance of ghost

The play I have studied for my Junior Certificate is William Shakespeare's tragedy 'Julius Caesar'. The scene which I have chosen to discuss is Act 4, Scene 3: the Quarrel Scene in Brutus' tent. The atmosphere throughout this scene is one of great tension.

The audience is never allowed to relax as events move from bitter fighting to heartbreaking admission to ghostly apparition.

The tension is introduced with the bitter row between Cassius and Brutus as they argue about money. Brutus insults Cassius, calling him a man with '**an itching palm**' because he accepts bribes, and saying haughtily that he, Brutus, would rather '**be a dog, and bay at the moon, / Than such a Roman**'. Cassius is incensed and threatens to harm Brutus, '**Urge me no more, I shall forget myself; / Have a mind upon your health; tempt me no further**'. Brutus accuses Cassius of denying him money to pay his legions, a charge which Cassius hotly denies. The tension increases until Cassius, in a dramatic gesture, asks Brutus to kill him rather than allow him to live in such misery.

If you are preparing a specific scene or scenes for use in a JC answer, then it is advisable to know the act and scene number.

This is the thesis, and every point made in the rest of the answer will support it.

At this, Brutus repents of his earlier anger and tells Cassius that the fault is partly his: **‘When I spoke... I was ill-tempered too’**. Cassius instantly grasps his hand in friendship, but before the audience can relax, a new note of tension is introduced. Brutus tells Cassius that the reason for his bad temper is the news of Portia’s suicide. The **pathos** of this revelation ensures that the audience is once again caught up in the drama of the scene.

The final moment of tension in this scene is the appearance of the ‘monstrous apparition that appears out of the shadows of the tent to make Brutus’ **‘blood cold’**.

His ominous warning to Brutus that he will see him **‘at Philippi’** is a chilling one. Brutus rushes to wake those around him in order to see if they have seen the ghost, but none of them have. The audience is left wondering if the ghost is real or a figment of Brutus’ guilty conscience.

‘Pathos’ is a quality which causes the audience to feel sympathy or sadness.



(b) Imagine you are directing your chosen scene on stage. Explain some of the decisions that you would make in order to create the mood or atmosphere successfully. Support your answer with reference to the play. (20)

If I were directing this scene on stage, I would use the character's position on stage, posture, gestures, and lighting to create the atmosphere of tension throughout the scene.

As Brutus and Cassius enter the tent, I would have them walking side by side, to signify that neither believes the other is superior to him. I would have Cassius gesticulating angrily to show his more fiery nature, while I would have Brutus walking more calmly with his hands clasped behind his back. Once they are in the tent, I would have them standing, facing one another but with a distance between them to signify that they have grown apart and that their friendship has begun to **'sicken and decay'**. As Cassius grows angrier at Brutus' criticism of his **'itching palm'**, I would have him stride towards Brutus, fists clenched. When he tells Brutus to **'Have a mind upon your health; tempt me no further'**, I would have Cassius raise his voice nearly to a shout and rest his hand on the hilt of his sword. Brutus should look unimpressed and wave a dismissive hand at him as he says **'Away, slight man!'** The difference between the men's posture and tone of voice should have the effect of highlighting the differences between their personalities and outlook and should add to the tension.

You must support every choice you make with detailed reference to or quotation from the text.

The anger and tension in this scene eases slightly when Cassius claims that he never denied Brutus money and that the messenger who told him that **'was but a fool'**. Cassius' tone should now turn slightly sad and pleading as he accuses Brutus of not caring about him any more and making his faults out to be **'greater than they are'**. As he takes out his dagger and asks Brutus to **'Strike, as thou dids't Caesar'**, I would have Cassius dramatically rip his tunic at the neck to expose his chest in order to make it easier for Brutus to stab him. At this stage, Brutus should move towards Cassius and gently push the dagger down, telling Cassius to sheathe it as he explains that he should not have been so angry. Cassius should immediately reach out to Brutus and clasp his hand warmly in both of his as the pair make up.

The brief interruption by the poet should break the men's embrace, and after the poet has left, Brutus should move to a chair and place his head in his hands as he tells Cassius that he is **'sick of many griefs'**. When he tells Cassius the reason for his sadness, Cassius should take a step backwards in shock, shaking his head slightly in disbelief as he says **'Ha! Portia!'** Then he too should sink into a chair, appearing shocked and distressed.

After Cassius has left and all but Brutus are asleep in the tent, I would have the lights dim so that the edges of the stage are in darkness. From this darkness, a shadowy shape should partially emerge. The lighting should just be enough for the audience to make out Caesar's ghost, dressed in the slashed and bloody toga he died in. He should point an accusing finger at Cassius, who should start from his chair in fear, staring wide-eyed at this apparition. The ghost should speak in a low, slow voice as he claims to be '**Thy evil spirit, Brutus**', and warns the other that he will see him '**at Philippi**'. After his brief message, the ghost should step slowly backwards into the shadows and vanish. I would have Brutus loudly and urgently call Lucius and his men to wake up, asking if they have seen anything. When they reply in the negative, I would have Brutus calmly give Varro and Claudius orders about the battle. Brutus is a Stoic and would want to give the outward appearance of being in complete control of his emotions. When all have left, I would have Brutus standing alone, staring at the corner of the tent from which the ghost emerged as I believe the sudden appearance and frustratingly sudden disappearance of the ghost would have left him more shaken than he might want to admit.

I would hope, through these stage directions, to convey the tense atmosphere that pervades this scene from start to finish.

It is a good idea to briefly refer back to the question in your final sentence and show that you have been doing your best to answer it all along.

2010 Junior Certificate Examination

1. Tension between characters is a common feature in drama. From a play you have studied, choose two characters who have a tense relationship.

(a) Explain the reason(s) for the tension that exists between these two characters.

(b) Imagine you are directing a stage production of this play. Select a scene where this tension is evident and explain what you, as director, would do to convey the tension between these two characters on stage.

Part One

The play I have studied for my Junior Certificate is William Shakespeare's tragedy 'Julius Caesar'. Two characters who have a tense relationship in the play are Brutus and Cassius.

One of the main causes of tension in the relationship is the difference in their personalities. While Brutus is noble and honourable, Cassius is cunning, unscrupulous and manipulative. He persuades Brutus to join the conspiracy by planting false letters in his house, and in a revealing soliloquy admits that he is using the other man:

**Well, Brutus, thou art noble; yet, I see,
Thy honourable metal may be wrought
From that it is disposed:**

From the start, then, the relationship is based on lies, which the audience realises, but Brutus does not.

Tension builds in the relationship once the conspiracy is underway. Cassius thought he could use Brutus as a figurehead and that he could be the real leader but he underestimated Brutus. Once he has agreed to join, Brutus takes control and – believing he is wiser than all of the others – makes decisions which put the conspirators in great jeopardy. He will not listen to Cassius' counsel and agrees to let Antony speak to the crowd after Caesar's assassination. Cassius is appalled:

**You know not what you do: do not consent
That Antony speak in his funeral:
Know you how much the people may be moved
By that which he will utter?**

The difference in the men's characters leads to a final showdown in the Quarrel Scene in Brutus' tent. The tension is introduced with the bitter

The highlighted phrases directly relate to the question. It is important to keep the question in mind throughout your answer and to avoid giving a summary of the scene. Every point must be relevant to the question.

row between Cassius and Brutus. While they are ostensibly arguing about money, the stress between the pair stems from far more than that. Their differences in philosophy and personality are coming to the fore, along with their individual blind spots. Brutus insults Cassius, calling him a man with **‘an itching palm’** because he accepts bribes, and saying haughtily that he, Brutus, would rather **‘be a dog, and bay at the moon, / Than such a Roman’**. Cassius is understandably incensed at this treatment at the hands of his friend, ally and brother-in-law, and threatens to harm Brutus, **‘Urge me no more, I shall forget myself; / Have a mind upon your health; tempt me no further’**. Brutus accuses Cassius of denying him money to pay his legions, a charge which Cassius hotly denies. The tension increases until Cassius, in a dramatic gesture, asks Brutus to kill him rather than allow him to live in such misery.

Although the two men are reconciled after this, theirs has been an uneasy friendship based on lies and marked by frequent disagreements.

(b) Imagine you are directing a stage production of this play. Select a scene where this tension is evident and explain what you, as director, would do to convey the tension between these two characters on stage.

The scene which I have chosen to discuss is Act 4, Scene 3: the Quarrel Scene in Brutus’ tent. The atmosphere throughout this scene is one of great tension as Brutus and Cassius’ friendship is tested to the limit. If I were directing this scene on stage, I would use the character’s position on stage, posture, gestures, and lighting to create the atmosphere of tension throughout the scene.

As Brutus and Cassius enter the tent, I would have them walking side by side, to signify that neither believes the other is superior to him. I would have Cassius gesticulating angrily to show his more fiery nature, while I would have Brutus walking more calmly with his hands clasped behind his back. Once they are in the tent, I would have them standing, facing one another but with a distance between them to signify that they have grown apart and that their friendship has begun to **‘sicken and decay’**. As Cassius grows angrier at Brutus’ criticism of his **‘itching palm’**, I would have him stride towards Brutus, fists clenched. When he tells Brutus to **‘Have a mind upon your health; tempt me no further’**, I would have Cassius raise his voice nearly to a shout and rest his hand on the hilt of his sword. Brutus should look unimpressed and wave a dismissive hand at

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him as he says **'Away, slight man!'** The difference between the men's posture and tone of voice should have the effect of highlighting the differences between their personalities and outlook and should add to the tension.

The anger and tension in this scene eases slightly when Cassius claims that he never denied Brutus money and that the messenger who told him that **'was but a fool'**. Cassius' tone should now turn slightly sad and pleading as he accuses Brutus of not caring about him any more and making his faults out to be **'greater than they are'**. As he takes out his dagger and asks Brutus to **'Strike, as thou dids't Caesar'**, I would have Cassius dramatically rip his tunic at the neck to expose his chest in order to make it easier for Brutus to stab him. At this stage, Brutus should move towards Cassius and gently push the dagger down, telling Cassius to sheathe it as he explains that he should not have been so angry. Cassius should immediately reach out to Brutus and clasp his hand warmly in both of his as the pair make up.

Although the open hostility between the two men has largely subsided at this stage, the differences in their personalities remains, and this is a constant source of tension. When Brutus tells Cassius the reason for his sadness, Cassius should take a step backwards in shock, shaking his head slightly in disbelief as he says **'Ha! Portia!'** Then he too should sink into a chair, appearing shocked and distressed. Brutus, on the other hand, should visibly regain control of himself sooner than Cassius, saying rather briskly, **'Speak no more of her'**, as he once more becomes the Stoic he wishes to be. As the two men move on to discuss the coming battle, their disagreements over strategy are clear. Brutus should speak rather arrogantly when rejecting Cassius' plans, saying **'Good reasons must, of force, give way to better.'** Cassius should lean towards Brutus as they pore over a map, trying to catch the other's eye as he pleads with him to **'Hear me, good brother'**. When Brutus refuses to listen to him, Cassius should move away from the table a little, once again creating a distance between the pair. Their quarrel may be over, but the fundamental reasons for the tension remain.