

Handout 2

"A Curtaine Lecture": The Domestic vs. Public Sphere in Julius Caesar

1. Hand out copies of the primary source document, "A Curtaine Lecture" (1637), the title-page image from an early modern book mocking controlling women, or project the image onto a large screen. Translate the Latin for the students (unless, of course, they can do it themselves) into "Don't believe wives" and "I speak the truth." Remind them to read the text at the bottom of the page in addition to studying the details in the illustration. (prime-cs_foralltime1.pdf)

2. Ask the students to describe the scene:

- * What is the relationship between the man and woman?
- * Where does the scene take place?
- * Who holds sway in this setting? Why?

Then, ask the students to consider the purpose of this document:

- * What is the tone of the image?
- * Who is the audience for this image?
- * What is the author/illustrator's message to this audience?

Be sure to record the students' ideas for future reference.

3. Divide the students into small groups. Give each group a copy of the exchange between Calphurnia and Caesar (2.2.52-60). Ask the students to determine who holds sway in this scene and why.

4. Now, give each group a copy of Caesar's dialogue with Decius (2.2.97-112). Have the students consider the following questions based on the text:

- * Who prevails in this exchange?
- * Caesar changes his mind in this scene. What argument convinces him?
- * How does this argument reflect on Calphurnia?

5. Pass around copies of some current political cartoons. (Cartoons referring to Hillary Clinton's power during her husband's presidency are excellent for this activity. Try "The Best of Hillary" from Slate's cartoon index at <http://cagle.slate.msn.com/>.) Ask the students if they see any correlation between the political cartoons and the primary source document.

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6. Have the students, either in their groups or individually, create a political cartoon describing Calphurnia's role in Caesar's decision. The students should address the following questions in their cartoon:

- * What does Calphurnia convince Caesar to do?
- * What is implied by Decius statement that "it were a mock/ Apt to be rendered, for someone to say/Break up the Senate till another time,/ When Caesar's wife shall meet with better dreams"?
- * Why does Caesar feel shame for having yielded to Calphurnia?

7. Finally, have students synthesize their ideas by writing a one-page essay detailing how their cartoon addresses the questions above, and how it compares to or differs from A Curtaine Lecture. Refer them back to the discussion of the primary source document. They should conclude by exploring how their cartoon informs their understanding of the play.

The following passages are used in this lesson:

Julius Caesar 2.2.52-60

CALPHURNIA Alas, my lord,
Your wisdom is consumed in confidence.
Do not go forth today. Call it my fear
That keeps you in the house, and not your own.
We'll send Mark Antony to the Senate House,
And he shall say you are not well today.
Let me, upon my knee, prevail in this. [She kneels.]

CAESAR
Mark Antony shall say I am not well,
And for thy humor I will stay at home.
[He lifts her up.]

Julius Caesar 2.2.97-112

DECIUS:
I have, when you have heard what I can say.
And know it now: the Senate have concluded
To give this day a crown to mighty Caesar.
If you shall send them word you will not come,
Their minds may change. Besides, it were a mock
Apt to be rendered, for someone to say
"Break up the Senate till another time,
When Caesar's wife shall meet with better dreams."
If Caesar hide himself, shall they not whisper
"Lo, Caesar is afraid"?
Pardon me, Caesar, for my dear dear love
To your proceeding bids me tell you this,
And reason to my love is liable.

CAESAR
How foolish do your fears seem now, Calphurnia!
I am ashamed I did yield to them.
Give me my robe, for I will go.