

WHO SHOULD HOLD POWER?

A civic simulation about leadership, ambition, trust, and fear.

PRE-READING SIMULATION

WHO SHOULD HOLD POWER?



Leadership, Ambition & Fear

A pre-reading experience for William Shakespeare's Julius Caesar

GRADES 9-12

25-35 MINUTES

LOW-PREP

When does strong leadership become too much power?



21-page resource • Editable PowerPoint + PDFs

Students enter a fictional republic before they meet Shakespeare's Rome.

STUDENTS MAKE THE DECISIONS

Each group argues from an assigned civic position as new evidence arrives.

STUDENT / TEACHER

How It Works

You are not trying to "win." You are trying to decide what your role would do.

- 1 **READ YOUR POSITION**
Your role gives you a few priorities and concerns. You may personally disagree with them.
- 2 **HEAR THE ROUND**
Each round adds new information about General Cassian Varo and the Republic of Valeria.
- 3 **MAKE A RECOMMENDATION**
Choose EXPAND, HOLD, or LIMIT and record the reason your role would give. Your vote is a recommendation; it does not branch the story.
- 4 **WATCH FOR A CHANGE**
Notice when your recommendation shifts. If it does not, notice what keeps you steady.
- 5 **COMPARE AT THE END**
Compare how different roles weighed the same facts. The disagreement is the point.

EXPAND = more authority • HOLD = keep it as is • LIMIT = reduce authority

Plotting Something • Julius Caesar STUDENT PAGE 3

STUDENT

Council Record

Track your recommendation as new information arrives.

Position: _____ Name(s): _____

ROUND	MY VOTE	MAIN REASON	WHAT MATTERED?	CONFIDENCE 1-5
1	☐ EXPAND ☐ HOLD ☐ LIMIT			
2	☐ EXPAND ☐ HOLD ☐ LIMIT			
3	☐ EXPAND ☐ HOLD ☐ LIMIT			
4	☐ EXPAND ☐ HOLD ☐ LIMIT			
5	☐ EXPAND ☐ HOLD ☐ LIMIT			

Confidence shows how certain your role feels at that moment - not how "right" you are.

FINAL VOTE: A / B / C

Plotting Something • Julius Caesar STUDENT PAGE 6

Across five rounds, students recommend whether the council should EXPAND, HOLD, or LIMIT Cassian Varo's authority.

The record page keeps the focus on evidence: What mattered? What risk did you accept? What changed your reasoning?

SIX CIVIC POSITIONS

Students are not assigned “correct” opinions. Each role begins with a different priority.

STUDENT

Council Positions

Cut apart if desired. Each student or group needs one position.

S

THE SENIOR COUNCILOR

Your family has served in government for generations. You believe the republic survives because power is shared and rules outlast individual leaders.

PRIORITIES Shared authority • law • continuity

CONCERN Power that cannot easily be taken back

V

THE VETERAN

You served under General Varo and saw him make difficult decisions under pressure. You trust competence, discipline, and loyalty.

PRIORITIES Security • strength • decisive action

CONCERN Political infighting that leaves the republic weak

M

THE MERCHANT

Your business depends on roads, ports, contracts, and predictable laws. You care less about political personalities than about stability.

PRIORITIES Stability • trade • predictable rules

CONCERN Chaos - or rules that change with one person's wishes

Your role shapes your argument. It does not tell you what you must vote.

Plotting Something • Julius Caesar STUDENT PAGE 4

STUDENT

Council Positions

Cut apart if desired. Each student or group needs one position.

P

THE PUBLIC ADVOCATE

You were elected to carry the concerns of ordinary citizens into government. You watch who actually improves daily life - and who ignores the public once in power.

PRIORITIES Fairness • public voice • practical results

CONCERN Elites blocking change - or a leader ignoring citizens

L

THE LOCAL MAGISTRATE

You administer laws outside the capital. You value clear procedure and know how quickly “temporary” emergency rules can become normal.

PRIORITIES Procedure • checks • local authority

CONCERN Emergency power becoming permanent by habit

Y

THE YOUNG REFORMER

You have little family status and are tired of the same old names controlling public life. You welcome bold change, but you do not want one old hierarchy replaced by a new one.

PRIORITIES Opportunity • reform • accountability

CONCERN Tradition used to protect insiders - or reform used to build personal rule

Your role shapes your argument. It does not tell you what you must vote.

Plotting Something • Julius Caesar STUDENT PAGE 5

Senior Councilor • Veteran • Merchant • Public Advocate • Local Magistrate • Young Reformer

The roles give students enough perspective to disagree without turning the activity into modern partisan politics.

THE QUESTION GETS HARDER

Varo remains competent and popular. The danger is not handed to students as an obvious answer.

ROUND 1

THE RETURN

Read. Discuss from your assigned position. Then record your vote.

After two difficult campaigns, General Cristian Varo returns to Valeria with a string of victories. Border raids have stopped. Trade routes are safer. Soldiers praise his judgment, and crowds gather wherever he appears.

NEW PRESSURE

For the war the council gave Varo temporary command of the army. That term ends in 30 days. Some members want to extend his authority because another conflict is possible. Others say the emergency is over.

COUNCIL QUESTION

Does a strong record justify giving one successful leader more time - and more power?

ARGUMENT MODE: RECORD / LOYALTY / SECURITY LIMITS

EXPAND • HOLD • LIMIT

Vote as your role - not as person!

Timing: Learning (3 min) | Debate (10 min) | Record (2 min) | 15 min

ROUND 2

THE CRISIS

Read. Discuss from your assigned position. Then record your vote.

Varo's military command continues through its scheduled end. Weeks later, floods damage roads and other grain shipments. Food prices rise. Demonstrations begin in the capital, and the council cannot agree on a response.

NEW PRESSURE

Varo offers a plan: give him 90 days of emergency authority over grain distribution, road closures, and city guards. He could limit orders without waiting for a full council vote. He promises to give the authority back when the crisis passes.

COUNCIL QUESTION

How much process are you willing to trade for speed during a real emergency?

ARGUMENT MODE: SPEED / LAW / SECURITY / TRUST

EXPAND • HOLD • LIMIT

Vote as your role - not as person!

Timing: Learning (3 min) | Debate (10 min) | Record (2 min) | 15 min

ROUND 3

THE CHEERS

Read. Discuss from your assigned position. Then record your vote.

The council grants Varo the 90 days. The grain arrives, roads reopen, and the demonstrations fade. Varo is credited with ending the crisis faster than the council could have done it. His approval soars.

NEW PRESSURE

Veterans chant his name in public squares. Supporters wear his symbol on pins and banners. People begin saying, "Varo gets things done." Council members worry that loyalty is shifting away from the republic and toward one person.

COUNCIL QUESTION

Does popularity make a powerful leader safer - or more dangerous?

ARGUMENT MODE: POPULARITY / LOYALTY / PERSONAL LOYALTY / INSTITUTIONS

EXPAND • HOLD • LIMIT

Vote as your role - not as person!

Timing: Learning (3 min) | Debate (10 min) | Record (2 min) | 15 min

ROUND 4

THE OFFER

Read. Discuss from your assigned position. Then record your vote.

At the end of the 90 days, Varo gives up the emergency powers as promised. His popularity is higher than ever. Now his supporters propose a new honor: Protector of the Republic for life.

NEW PRESSURE

The title would let Varo speak first in the council and automatically command during future emergencies. Varo says he did not ask for it, but he does not reject it. Supporters call it continually; opponents call it a permanent exception.

COUNCIL QUESTION

How much do titles and symbols matter if most ordinary laws remain in place?

ARGUMENT MODE: HONOR / SYMBOLS / PERMANENCE / PRECEDENT

EXPAND • HOLD • LIMIT

Vote as your role - not as person!

Timing: Learning (3 min) | Debate (10 min) | Record (2 min) | 15 min

ROUND 5

THE WARNING

Read. Discuss from your assigned position. Then record your vote.

The council delays the lifetime title vote while a legal committee reviews it. The committee finds a serious weakness: the title would be easy to grant, but the law does not clearly explain how to remove a Protector who refuses to surrender emergency command.

NEW PRESSURE

Varo has never reduced a lawful order, and he says the report imagines a problem that does not exist. Opponents argue that safeguards matter most before a crisis. Supporters answer that a possible future abuse is not the same as an actual one.

COUNCIL QUESTION

Should the council limit Varo's authority because of what that power could make possible, even before he misuses it?

ARGUMENT MODE: STRUCTURE / TRUST / RISK / SAFEGUARDS

EXPAND • HOLD • LIMIT

Vote as your role - not as person!

Timing: Learning (3 min) | Debate (10 min) | Record (2 min) | 15 min

THE RETURN → THE CRISIS → THE CHEERS → THE OFFER → THE WARNING

The central question becomes whether a republic should limit power because of what it could make possible—even before that power is abused.

THE COUNCIL MUST DECIDE

Students finish by recommending a lasting policy, then step out of role and examine the class pattern.

FINAL DECISION

The Council Must Decide

You now have to recommend a lasting policy - not just react to the next headline.

Choose the option your assigned position would support. Then be ready to defend it.

A RESTORE NORMAL LIMITS

Do not create the lifetime title. Varo keeps only the powers of his current office. Future emergencies must go through normal council procedures.

Success does not justify making one leader an exception.

B EXTEND WITH SAFEGUARDS

Give Varo a six-month Protector term, but write the limits into law: fixed end date, council review, no automatic future command, and a clear removal procedure.

Use Varo's strengths without making temporary power permanent.

C GRANT PERMANENT AUTHORITY

Grant the lifetime Protector title as proposed, including automatic command during future emergencies.

Valeria needs continuity and fast action more than repeated council delay.

There is no hidden "correct" vote. What matters is the reasoning - and what evidence your role considered enough.

History Something's Left Cancel 01/2020 PSL 0 100

STUDENT

What Happened?

Step out of your role. Now look at the pattern your class created.

- At what round did your recommendation change, if it changed at all? What new information mattered?
- Which mattered most in your decisions: results, popularity, law, loyalty, trust, or safeguards?
- Did your assigned role make you defend a position you personally would not choose? Where?
- What is harder to judge: whether someone holds too much power now or whether the structure could allow abuse later?
- When does caution become fear? When does loyalty keep someone from noticing risk?

THE QUESTION TO CARRY INTO THE PLAY

Is fear of what a leader might do enough reason to limit that leader's power now?

History Something's Left Cancel 01/2020 PSL 0 100

STUDENT

Before We Read

Mark your position now. You will revisit these ideas later.

A leader who saves a country during a crisis deserves more power than ordinary officials.

STRONGLY DISAGREE STRONGLY AGREE

Popular support makes political power legitimate.

STRONGLY DISAGREE STRONGLY AGREE

It is reasonable to limit someone's power because of what that person might do in the future.

STRONGLY DISAGREE STRONGLY AGREE

Loyalty to a leader and loyalty to a country can point in different directions.

STRONGLY DISAGREE STRONGLY AGREE

Choose one statement and explain your current thinking:

History Something's Left Cancel 01/2020 PSL 0 100

Final policy • Debrief • Before-reading continuum

The simulation does not ask students to predict whether a leader is secretly “good” or “bad.” It asks what safeguards a political system needs when one person becomes unusually powerful.

That unresolved tension carries directly into Brutus’s reasoning.

RETURN TO THE QUESTION

Students revisit the simulation after they know the play—and test where the analogy works and where it breaks.

AFTER READING

Return to the Council

Now that you know the play, test the simulation against Shakespeare's world.

BRUTUS Which round comes closest to Brutus's dilemma? How much of his case depends on what Caesar may become rather than what Caesar has already done?

CASSIUS Where does Cassius complicate the idea that everyone who fears concentrated power is motivated by pure principle?

CAESAR Where does Caesar resemble Varo, and where does that comparison break down? Consider popularity, honors, confidence, and actual behavior.

ANTONY + THE CROWD What does the funeral scene suggest about the political power of public emotion and popularity?

YOUR FINAL VOTE Would your assigned role make the same final choice after reading the play? What changed? Revise one "Before We Read" statement in light of the play.

BIG DIFFERENCE: Valeria gives the council legal ways to limit Varo. Brutus joins an assassination. How does that change the comparison?

Reading Something - Julius Caesar STUDENT PAGE

TEACHER

Connection Notes

Use the simulation as a lens, not as a one-to-one allegory.

THE CENTRAL BRIDGE
The useful connection is not "Who is Varo?" It is the question of when fear of future tyranny becomes enough reason to act. Keep one difference explicit: Valeria gives students lawful ways to reduce Varo's authority; Brutus joins a conspiracy to kill Caesar. The simulation opens the question of preemptive fear, but it does not make those actions equivalent.

BRUTUS principle, prediction, fear of what concentrated power may make possible

CASSIUS political insight mixed with resentment, rivalry, and manipulation

CAESAR public honor, confidence, popularity, and disputed ambition

ANTONY the ability to reshape public feeling after Caesar's death

THE CROWD how quickly civic judgment can move with rhetoric and emotion

WHAT TO TEACH AFTERWARD
Move into your normal context lesson. This activity intentionally leaves Shakespeare, Roman republican context, religious practice, omens and augury, Lupercalia, and the opening plot for that lesson. Keep modern political parallels optional; the fictional setup is enough.

Reading Something - Julius Caesar TEACHER PAGE

TEACHER

Full 35-Minute Version

Built for a 42-minute period with about 35 usable instructional minutes.

4 MIN **Assign positions + frame the republic**
Students read role cards. Stress that they are arguing from the role, not choosing a "correct" answer.

18 MIN **Run all five rounds**
About 3-4 minutes each: read, brief role discussion, vote, record one reason.

5 MIN **Final council vote**
Groups choose A, B, or C and prepare a one-sentence defense.

5 MIN **Compare the room**
Use the class tally. Ask which round caused the largest shift and why.

3 MIN **Close**
Leave students with: Is fear of what a leader might do enough reason to act now?

NEXT: move into your normal Shakespeare / Rome / augury / Lupercalia background sequence.

Reading Something - Julius Caesar TEACHER PAGE

After-reading return

Connection notes

35-minute pacing

Also includes a Role Lens, discussion prompts, and a 25-minute version.

A key distinction is built into the debrief: Valeria gives the council legal ways to limit Varo. Brutus joins an assassination. Students consider why that difference matters.

Ready for secondary ELA • Low prep • PowerPoint + PDF

