

## 2015 Study Guide for *Antony and Cleopatra* by William Shakespeare

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### Before seeing/reading the play

1. Research the historical figures in the play and in the action that precedes it: Julius Caesar; Pompey the Great; his son, Sextus Pompey; Cleopatra; Mark Antony; his wife, Fulvia; Octavius Caesar; his sister, Octavia; and Aemilius Lepidus. Pay attention to their relationships, both personal and political. What became of those who lived on beyond the time covered by the play? These and other websites provide information:  
<http://www.vroma.org/~bmcmanus/caesar.html>  
<http://ancienthistory.about.com/cs/rome/g/pompey.htm>  
<http://www.unrv.com/fall-republic/sextus-pompey.php>  
<http://www.biography.com/people/cleopatra-vii-9250984>  
<http://www.notablebiographies.com/Lo-Ma/Mark-Antony.html>  
<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/221972/Fulvia>  
<http://www.roman-empire.net/emperors/augustus.html>  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Octavia\\_Minor](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Octavia_Minor)  
<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/336835/Marcus-Aemilius-Lepidus>
2. Research Cleopatra's ancestor Ptolemy Soter. How did he and his descendants come to rule Egypt? What was Egypt's value to Rome? What was Egypt's relationship with Rome under the Ptolemies? These and other websites provide information:  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ptolemaic\\_Dynasty#Ptolemaic\\_rulers](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ptolemaic_Dynasty#Ptolemaic_rulers)  
<http://www.touregypt.net/alexhis1.htm>
3. Read Shakespeare's source for *Antony and Cleopatra*: Plutarch's "Antony," found in his book The Lives of Noble Grecians and Romans. According to Plutarch, why does Cleopatra travel to meet Antony? What is the location of their first meeting? What are the key locations mentioned by Plutarch in his account? These and other websites provide information:  
[http://www.shsu.edu/his\\_ncp/AntCleo.html](http://www.shsu.edu/his_ncp/AntCleo.html)  
[http://www.britaininprint.net/shakespeare/study\\_tools/sources\\_antony.html](http://www.britaininprint.net/shakespeare/study_tools/sources_antony.html)

4. What was considered proper behavior for Roman women? How much independence did they have? What restrictions were placed on their activities? Who controlled their lives? Why aren't there detailed historical accounts documenting women's daily lives in ancient Rome? These and other websites provide information:  
<http://www.pbs.org/empires/romans/empire/women.html>  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women\\_in\\_ancient\\_Rome#Women\\_and\\_the\\_law](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women_in_ancient_Rome#Women_and_the_law)
5. Research the Roman governmental system of the triumvirate. What are the roots of the word? Why were the Triumvirates formed? What political purpose did they serve? Who comprised the First and Second Triumvirates? What weaknesses and pitfalls are inherent in this system? These and other websites provide information:  
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Triumvirate>  
<http://www.livius.org/to-ts/triumvir/triumvir.html>
6. Research the culture of Roman soldiers. To what or whom were they loyal? What was the basis of their loyalty? What gave them their pride? This and other websites provide information:  
<http://www.crystalinks.com/romemilitary.html>
7. Research the Roman virtues, the concept of *dignitas* and their attitude toward suicide. How did male citizens acquire prestige or honor? In what circumstances was it considered honorable or even necessary to commit suicide? These and other websites provide information:  
<http://www.crystalinks.com/romanvirtues.html>  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dignitas\\_%28Roman\\_concept%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dignitas_%28Roman_concept%29)  
<https://suite.io/arash-farzaneh/4sa32c7>
8. Research the mythic beings invoked in the play: Mars. Venus. Juno. Jove (Jupiter). Mercury. Eros. Hercules. The shirt of Nessus. Ajax (Telamon). Dido and Aeneas. Isis. These and other websites provide information:  
<http://www.crystalinks.com/romegods.html>  
<http://www.pantheon.org/articles/h/hercules.html>  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nessus\\_\(mythology\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nessus_(mythology))  
<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/11250/Ajax>

<http://www.mythencyclopedia.com/Cr-Dr/Dido.html>

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/295449/Isis>

9. Research Roman and Egyptian beliefs in soothsayers and omens. In what ways does Shakespeare include these rituals in the retelling of Antony and Cleopatra? What special effects were available to Shakespeare that would aid his company in conveying ancient omens to audiences? These and other websites provide information:

<http://www.roman-empire.net/religion/superstitions.html>

[http://www.ancient.eu/Roman\\_Religion/](http://www.ancient.eu/Roman_Religion/)

<http://findingshakespeare.co.uk/ominous-oboos>

10. Research the Roman concept of triumph. What were the components of a triumph? Whom was it staged to honor? How were defeated enemies exhibited? This and other websites provide information:

<http://www.unrv.com/culture/roman-triumph.php>

11. What was the *Pax Romana*, and how was it associated with Octavius Caesar (later Augustus)? How long did it last? Why was the defeat of Antony and Cleopatra necessary for the establishment of the *Pax Romana*? This and other websites provide information:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pax\\_Romana](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pax_Romana)

## Resources

### Film/TV:

*Antony and Cleopatra* (1972), directed by and starring Charlton Heston

*Antony and Cleopatra* (1974), directed by Jon Scoffield

*Antony and Cleopatra* (1981), BBC, directed by Jonathan Miller

*Antony and Cleopatra* (1983), directed by Lawrence Carra

### Learn more about Shakespeare's life and times at the following websites:

<http://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/Library/SLT/index.html>

<http://www.folger.edu/template.cfm?cid=865&CFID=6230886&CFTOKEN=25420173>

<http://www.shakespeare.org.uk/explore-shakespeare.html>

<http://www.bardweb.net/man.html>

## After seeing/reading the play

1. Refer to your research and reading of Plutarch's account of "Antony." Which locations does Shakespeare emphasize in his retelling of Antony's life with Cleopatra? What key events occur in each of these places? What do the geographic distances between them tell you about the scale of the story being told?
2. Shakespeare previews the play's major themes in the first speech of Act I. Find the words in the opening scene that reveal the Roman attitude toward Antony's military prowess. What is the Roman attitude towards Antony's relationship with Cleopatra? What plot developments are promised? What conflicts are hinted at?
3. Shakespeare structures his retelling of Antony and Cleopatra's story using opposites: a younger culture versus an ancient one, masculine authority versus feminine, Senate rule versus an absolute monarchy, honor versus dishonor and work versus play. What are the principal characteristics, values, strengths and weaknesses of Egypt, according to the Romans? According to the Egyptians? What are the principal characteristics, values, strengths and weaknesses of Rome, according to the Egyptians? According to the Romans? In what ways do these opposites highlight the conflicts between Rome and Egypt?
4. How does Octavius Caesar represent the values of Rome? How does Cleopatra represent Egyptian values? How do the values of Rome endanger Egypt, and how do the values of Egypt endanger Rome? To what extent can these differences coexist?
5. Find descriptions in the text of Antony's past as a great soldier. What does he believe he has become? Find examples in the text that show what he has in fact become. To what extent are the changes in his personality the result of Cleopatra's influence? How does his behavior vary according to his geographical location? How does he reconcile his "Egyptian self" with his "Roman self"?
6. Cleopatra is often referred to as a complex character. Take note of key facets of her personality. Which contradict each other? How has Antony grown complex through association with her? What are key facets of Antony's personality? Which are in

conflict with each other? How does he deal with these contrary forces? How does Cleopatra deal with hers?

7. Refer to your reading of Plutarch's "Antony." What events and language did Shakespeare take directly from Plutarch? What elements did he omit or change? How do these changes enhance the story?
8. In what ways do the other characters describe and speak about Octavia? How does she present herself? What are Octavius Caesar's feelings for her? How does he use her politically? How does Antony use her politically? How successful are Octavius' and Antony's political schemes regarding Octavia?
9. Refer to your research on the mythic beings invoked in the play. In their role-playing, both Antony and Cleopatra occasionally take the part of divine beings. What gods are associated with Antony in the play? How do aspects of his personality reflect these gods? What goddesses does Cleopatra consciously portray? How do they reflect her personality and serve her needs?
10. Refer to your research on Roman women. How does Fulvia exceed her womanly function? How do the Romans categorize Cleopatra? How does her open sexuality endanger Roman values? How do the Romans regard Octavia's sexuality, and how do they exploit it?
11. Refer to your research on the historical figures found in this play. Who is Pompey? Who was his father, and what became of him? To whom is Pompey a threat? Account for the tension between him and Antony. Between him and Octavius Caesar. How would an alliance of Octavius Caesar and Antony endanger Pompey? What kind of arrangement does he make with them?
12. Refer to your research on triumvirates. How are the members of the Second Triumvirate connected to members of the First? What animosities have been passed from the First to the Second? What strengths and weaknesses does each member of the Second bring to the group? What becomes of the Second Triumvirate by the play's end?

13. What plot does Menas propose to rid Pompey of Antony, Octavius Caesar and their followers (Act II, scene vi)? Why does Pompey reject it?
14. Refer to your research on the Roman virtues and *dignitas*. What does honor mean to the following characters: Antony, Cleopatra, Octavius Caesar, Octavia, Pompey, Enobarbus and Eros? When do they act honorably? When and why do they act dishonorably?
15. Describe the spectacles staged by Cleopatra, those shown in the action and those presented in words. What does she want in each case, and how does the spectacle help her get it? What do pomp and spectacle mean to Octavius Caesar? What display does he consider crucial to his sister's status? What spectacle does he plan for himself in Rome, and what does he intend to achieve with it?
16. Find instances when Cleopatra deliberately lies. In each case, what does she intend the lies to achieve? When do her schemes work? When do they backfire? Why must Cleopatra resort to lying? In what ways do her political associations and obligations lead her to less honorable ways of solving problems or gathering information?
17. Find passages in the text that glorify Antony's generosity. In what circumstances is his generosity especially notable? What do his enemies say about his generosity? In what ways does he give generously to secure the loyalty of his friends and soldiers?
18. Refer to your research on Roman and Egyptian omens and gods. In Act IV, scene iii Antony's soldiers hear strange music coming from the earth, which they believe to be an omen. How do they interpret it? What does the god Hercules symbolize to Antony? What do the soldiers believe will be the outcome of Antony's battle against Octavius Caesar? What part of the play's greater action does this scene foreshadow?
19. Describe the relationship between Antony and Enobarbus, considering their ranks and the many years of friendship. What is the function of Enobarbus in the play? What does he do for the audience? How does the relationship between Enobarbus and Antony differ from relationships they have with the Egyptians?

20. Follow the transformations of Enobarbus' relationship to Antony. Why does he choose to remain loyal? What factors cause him to change his mind and abandon Antony? What prompts his subsequent repentance? How does he regard himself at the end?
21. The word "last" occurs 17 times in the play. What people, actions, conditions and emotional states are approaching their "lasts"? What does the repetition of this word reveal about the themes of the play? What does it prepare us for?
22. What does music mean to the Egyptians? What does it mean to Romans? When does the script call for music? What mood does it create? In what ways does music help establish the opposing culture of Rome versus Egypt?
23. In Act IV, scene xiv and beginning with "Sometimes we see a cloud that's dragonish," what natural phenomenon does this passage describe? To what quality of the clouds does Antony compare his present situation? What does he believe will be the outcome of the battle he will fight? Even though he doesn't say it outright, what qualities of Cleopatra does he see in the shifting clouds?
24. Refer to your research on the Roman *dignitas* and Roman attitude toward suicide. What changes in fortune cause Antony to choose to kill himself? What cultural precedent does he have for this action? In what ways does he hope to recover or reestablish his civil honor and prestige? What does he believe the afterlife will hold for him?
25. Compare the deaths of Cleopatra's women Charmian and Iras with the deaths of Antony's men Enobarbus and Eros. How does each die? Why does each find death preferable to life?
26. Why does Cleopatra choose to kill herself? Describe the theatrical elements she incorporates into the spectacle of her death. What role would she be forced to play if she remained alive? What other humiliations does she avoid by dying? What does she believe the afterlife will hold for her?

27. If you are also seeing *Head Over Heels*, compare and contrast Basilius and Gynecia with Antony and Cleopatra. How do these characters express love privately versus the way they express their love in public? What are the consequences of having a public romance? What actions do they take to save their relationships and what do they learn in the process?

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