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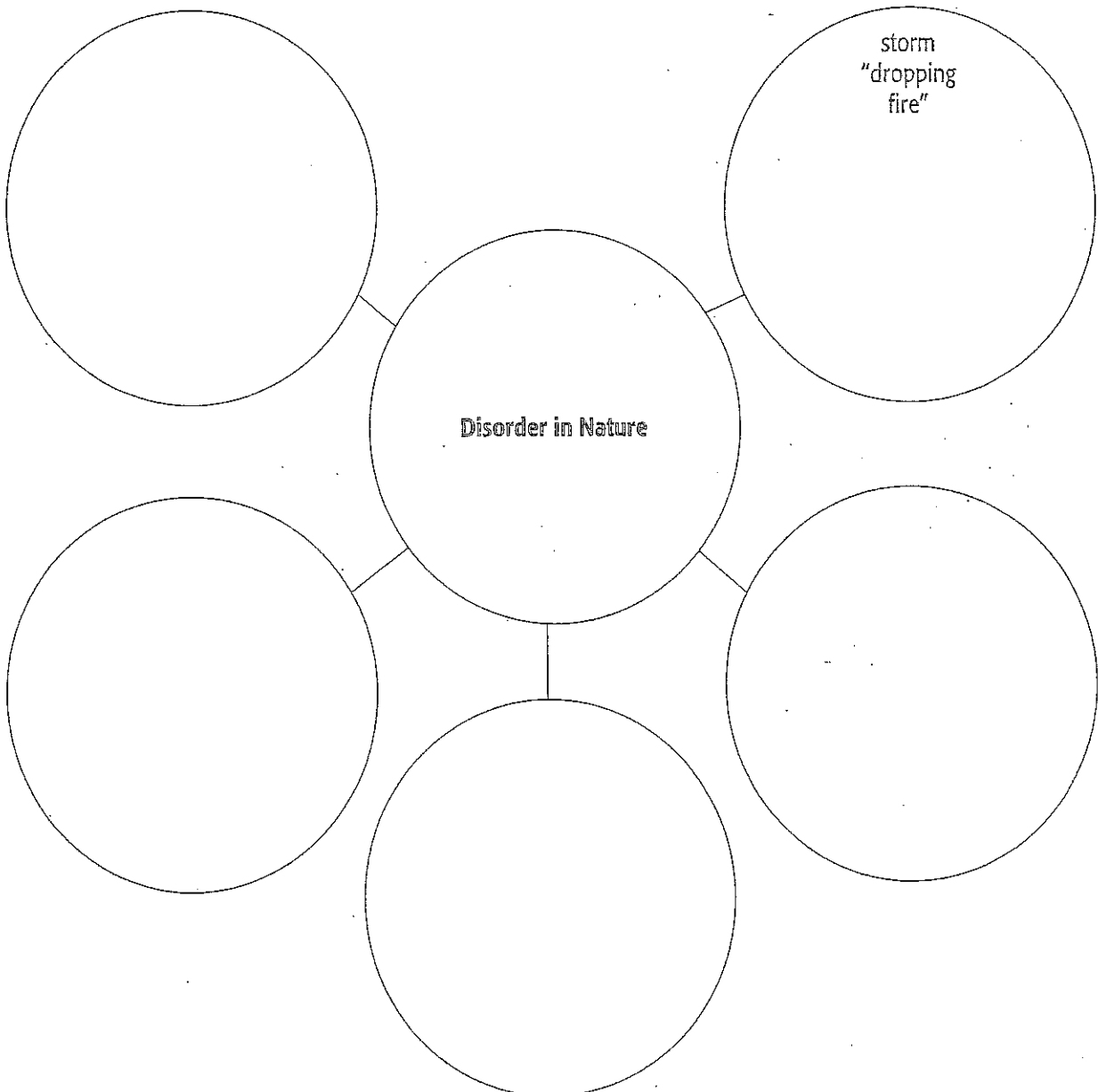
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The Tragedy of Julius Caesar: Act I, page 530

Analyze Literature: Motif

A **motif** is any element that recurs in one or more works of literature or art. The motif of disorder in nature runs throughout much of Shakespeare's work and usually signifies the disorder of the political state.

As you read *Julius Caesar*, note the motif of disorder in nature as it occurs and jot the details down in the cluster chart below. One example has been provided. You will want to continue to fill in this chart as you read the entire act and ask yourself what, specifically, is out of order in the political state?



DURING READING

SCENE III: A STREET IN ROME, ONE MONTH LATER

Thunder and lightning. Enter from opposite sides CASCA with his sword drawn and CICERO.

CICERO. Good even,¹ Casca; brought you Caesar home?
Why are you breathless, and why stare you so?

CASCA. Are not you mov'd, when all the sway of earth²
Shakes like a thing unfirm? O Cicero,
5 I have seen tempests³ when the scolding winds
Have riv'd⁴ the knotty oaks, and I have seen
Th' ambitious ocean swell, and rage, and foam,
To be exalted with⁵ the threat'ning clouds;
But never till tonight, never till now,
10 Did I go through a tempest dropping fire.
Either there is a civil strife in heaven,
Or else the world, too saucy with the gods,
Incenses them to send destruction.⁶

CICERO. Why, saw you anything more wonderful?

15 CASCA. A common slave—you know him well by sight—
Held up his left hand which did flame and burn
Like twenty torches join'd; and yet his hand,
Not sensible of fire, remain'd unscorch'd.
Besides—I ha' not since put up my sword—
20 Against⁷ the Capitol I met a lion,
Who glaz'd⁸ upon me, and went surly by,
Without annoying me. And there were drawn
Upon a heap a hundred ghastly women,⁹
Transformed with their fear, who swore they saw
25 Men, all in fire, walk up and down the streets.
And yesterday the bird of night¹⁰ did sit
Even at noon-day upon the market-place,
Howling¹¹ and shrieking. When these prodigies
Do so conjointly meet, let not men say,
30 "These are their reasons, they are natural";
For I believe they are portentous things
Unto the climate that they point upon.¹²

CICERO. Indeed, it is a strange-disposed¹³ time;
But men may construe things after their fashion
35 Clean from the purpose of the things themselves.¹⁴
Comes Caesar to the Capitol tomorrow?

Disorder in Nature

* Men will interpret things as they choose *

ACT I, SCENE III

1. **even.** Evening

2. **all the sway of earth.**
Whole pattern or rule of things

3. **tempests.** Storms

4. **riv'd.** Split open

5. **exalted with.** Raised up to

6. **Either...destruction.**
Either there is civil war in heaven or else the gods are trying to destroy the world because they are angry (incensed) by people's disrespectful (saucy) ways.

7. **Against.** Near

8. **glaz'd.** Gazed or glared

sur • ly (sūr' lē) *adj.*, bad-tempered; hostile

9. **drawn / Upon a heap... ghastly women.** A hundred women, white like ghosts, were gathered in a huddle.

10. **bird of night.** Owl

11. **Howling.** Hooting

por • ten • tous (pōr ten' tēs) *adj.*, predictive; foreboding; ominous

12. **When these...upon.**
When these exceptional things (prodigies) happen all at once (conjointly)...they are ominous signs of things to come in the climate, or region, in which they occur.

13. **strange-disposed.**
Unusual; abnormal

14. **men may...themselves.**
Men are capable of misunderstanding the actual meanings of things.

CASCA. He doth; for he did bid Antonio
Send word to you he would be there tomorrow.

CICERO. Good night then, Casca; this disturbed sky
Is not to walk in.¹⁵

40 CASCA. Farewell, Cicero.

Exit CICERO.

Enter CASSIUS.

CASSIUS. Who's there?

CASCA. A Roman.

CASSIUS. Casca, by your voice.

CASCA. Your ear is good. Cassius, what night is this!

CASSIUS. A very pleasing night to honest men.

CASCA. Who ever knew the heavens menace so?

45 CASSIUS. Those that have known the earth so full of faults.

For my part, I have walk'd about the streets,

Submitting me unto the perilous night;

And thus unbraced,¹⁶ Casca, as you see,

Have bar'd my bosom to the thunder-stone;¹⁷

50 And when the cross¹⁸ blue lightning seem'd to open

The breast of heaven, I did present myself

Even in the aim and very flash of it.

CASCA. But wherefore¹⁹ did you so much tempt the heavens?

It is the part²⁰ of men to fear and tremble

55 When the most mighty gods by tokens send

Such dreadful heralds to astonish us.

CASSIUS. You are dull, Casca; and those sparks of life

That should be in a Roman you do want,²¹

Or else you use not. You look pale, and gaze,

60 And put on fear, and cast yourself in wonder,

To see the strange impatience of the heavens;

But if you would consider the true cause

Why all these fires, why all these gliding ghosts,

Why birds and beasts from quality and kind,²²

65 Why old men, fools, and children calculate,²³

Why all these things change from their ordinance,²⁴

Their natures, and preformed faculties,²⁵

To monstrous quality—why, you shall find

That heaven hath infus'd them with these spirits,

15. **not to walk in.** Not safe to walk under

16. **unbraced.** With jacket open

17. **thunder-stone.** Lightning; thunderbolt

18. **cross.** Jagged or zig-zagged

19. **wherefore.** Why

20. **part.** Role

21. **want.** Lack

22. **from quality and kind.** Not displaying their normal characteristics and natures

23. **calculate.** Prophecy

24. **ordinance.** Usual ways of being

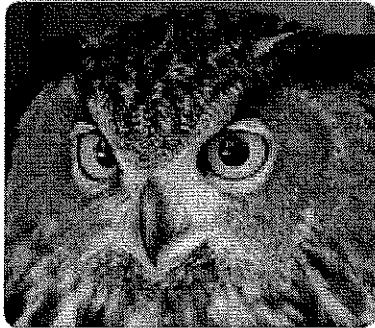
25. **preformed faculties.** Innate or inborn qualities

The heavens are upset

The heavens are sending us a message

CULTURAL

CONNECTION



Elizabethan Superstition The people who lived in Shakespeare's day are called Elizabethans, after their great monarch Queen Elizabeth I. The Elizabethans were extremely superstitious. They believed in astrology, magic, witchcraft, good and bad omens, ghosts, fortune-telling, and alchemy. Animals were often considered omens. For instance, owls and ravens were both associated with death. Belief in the supernatural was common, and Queen Elizabeth's successor, James I, wrote a popular work on witchcraft, the *Daemonologie*, in 1599. Do you share any of the beliefs of the Elizabethans? How did Shakespeare's descriptions of the abnormal events of the times affect you? How do you think these descriptions might have affected an Elizabethan audience?

Disorder in Nature

70 To make them instruments of fear and warning
Unto some monstrous state.²⁶

Now could I, Casca, name to thee a man
Most like this dreadful night,
That thunders, lightens, opens graves, and roars

75 As doth the lion in the Capitol—
A man no mightier than thyself, or me,
In personal action, yet prodigious²⁷ grown,
And fearful, as these strange eruptions are.

CASCA. 'Tis Caesar that you mean; is it not, Cassius?

80 CASSIUS. Let it be who it is; for Romans now
Have thews²⁸ and limbs like to their ancestors;
But woe the while,²⁹ our fathers' minds are dead,
And we are govern'd with our mothers' spirits;
Our yoke and sufferance³⁰ show us womanish.

85 CASCA. Indeed, they say, the senators tomorrow
Mean to establish Caesar as a king;

26. **heaven...state.** The gods have filled them with supernatural powers in order to warn the Romans of a terrible, or unnatural, state of affairs or government.

27. **prodigious.** Ominous and enormous

28. **thews.** Sinews or muscles
29. **woe the while.** Pity the times

30. **yoke and sufferance.** Servitude and the acceptance of it

And he shall wear his crown by sea and land,
In every place, save here in Italy.

CASSIUS. I know where I will wear this dagger then;
90 Cassius from bondage will deliver Cassius.³¹

Therein, ye gods, you make the weak most strong;
Therein, ye gods, you tyrants do defeat;
Nor stony tower, nor walls of beaten brass,
Nor airless dungeon, nor strong links of iron,

95 Can be retentive to the strength of spirit;³²
But life, being weary of these worldly bars,
Never lacks power to dismiss itself.
If I know this, know all the world besides,
That part of tyranny that I do bear
I can shake off at pleasure.

threatens
to kill
himself if
Caesar is
crowned king.

31. **will deliver Cassius.**
That is, by killing himself

32. **Nor stony...spirit.** This
idea was later expressed by
poet Richard Lovelace: "Stone
walls do not a prison make /
Nor iron bars a cage," because
the spirit cannot be impris-
oned or contained.

Thunder still.

100 CASCA. So can I;
So every bondman³³ in his own hand bears
The power to cancel his captivity.

CASSIUS. And why should Caesar be a tyrant then?
Poor man, I know he would not be a wolf

105 But that he sees the Romans are but sheep;
He were no lion, were not Romans hinds.³⁴
Those that with haste will make a mighty fire
Begin it with weak straws. What trash is Rome?
What rubbish and what offal?³⁵ when it serves

110 For the base matter to illuminate
So vile a thing as Caesar! But, O grief,
Where hast thou led me? I, perhaps, speak this
Before a willing bondman; then I know
My answer must be made. But I am arm'd,
115 And dangers are to me indifferent.³⁶

CASCA. You speak to Casca, and to such a man
That is no fleering tell-tale.³⁷ Hold, my hand
Be factious for redress of all these griefs,³⁸
And I will set this foot of mine as far
As who goes farthest.

120 CASSIUS. There's a bargain made.
Now know you, Casca, I have mov'd already
Some certain of the noblest-minded Romans
To undergo with me an enterprise
Of honorable-dangerous consequence;

Caesar's
Slave by
Choice

They shook
on it. If
you are involved
in a plot to
kill Caesar,
I am
too

33. **bondman.** Serf or slave

34. **hinds.** Deer

35. **offal** (ô' fəl). Trash

36. **I, perhaps...indiffer-
ent.** Perhaps you (Casca) are
a willing slave of Caesar, in
which case you will want to
fight me. But I am armed and
unafraid of danger.

37. **fleering tell-tale.**
Sneering tattletale

38. **Be...griefs.** Form a fac-
tion, or political group, to
fight these wrongs.