



Julius Caesar Irony

Irony is marked by a discrepancy between what is expected and what occurs. Irony deliberately contrasts expectations in order to create humor, engage the audience, or emphasize a concept. Review the different kinds of irony found in literature.

Verbal irony, also known as sarcasm, is a direct contradiction between what is spoken and what is meant.

Example: Someone says, "It's freezing out!" on a 100-degree day.

Situational irony occurs when something happens that is the opposite of what is expected.

Example: Romeo, a Montague, falls in love with Juliet, a Capulet, despite the two families being sworn enemies.

Dramatic irony occurs when the audience is aware of something that a character is not, creating an incongruity between the character's action and the audience's understanding and expectations.

Example: In *Romeo and Juliet*, the audience is aware that Juliet is alive when Romeo drinks the poison because he believes she is dead.

Examine how irony is used in each of the listed selections from *Julius Caesar* to create humor, contrast ideas, and/or convey emotion. Using the definitions listed above, identify the type of irony (verbal, situational, or dramatic) and then write a brief explanation of how the incongruity creates meaning. Be sure to review the context for each selection to better understand the use of irony within.

Example:

CASSIUS

And this man

Is now become a god, and Cassius is

A wretched creature and must bend his body

If Caesar carelessly but nod on him.

(No Fear: 1.2.117–120)

Irony:

Verbal irony

Explanation:

Cassius's suggestion that Caesar is a god is ironic because it is incongruent with the story he has just told about having to save Caesar's life. Cassius's story depicts Caesar as weak. This statement presents him as a god, which indicates strength; thus, the discrepancy suggests that the statement is ironic and that Cassius is mocking Caesar through this statement.

1. Calphurnia's Dream

CAESAR

I will let you know.

Calphurnia here, my wife, stays me at home.

She dreamt tonight she saw my statue,

Which, like a fountain with an hundred spouts,

Did run pure blood. And many lusty Romans

Came smiling and did bathe their hands in it.

And these does she apply for warnings and portents

And evils imminent . . .

DECIUS

This dream is all amiss interpreted.

It was a vision fair and fortunate.

Your statue spouting blood in many pipes,

In which so many smiling Romans bathed,

Signifies that from you great Rome shall suck

Reviving blood, and that great men shall press

For tinctures, stains, relics, and cognizance.

This by Calphurnia's dream is signified.

(No Fear: 2.2.74–90)

Irony:

Explanation:

2. Artemidorus's Warning

ARTEMIDORUS

O Caesar, read mine first, for mine's a suit
That touches Caesar nearer. Read it, great Caesar.

CAESAR

What touches us ourself shall be last served.

(No Fear: 3.1.7–9)

Irony:

Explanation:

3. Antony Shakes Hands with the Conspirators

ANTONY

I doubt not of your wisdom.

Let each man render me his bloody hand.

(shakes hands with the conspirators)

First, Marcus Brutus, will I shake with you.

—Next, Caius Cassius, do I take your hand.

—Now, Decius Brutus, yours.—Now yours, Metellus.

—Yours, Cinna.—And, my valiant Casca, yours.

—Though last, not last in love, yours, good Trebonius.

—Gentlemen all, alas, what shall I say?

My credit now stands on such slippery ground

That one of two bad ways you must conceit me,

Either a coward or a flatter[.]

(No Fear: 3.1.193–204)

Irony:

Explanation:

4. The Funeral Speech

ANTONY

When that the poor have cried, Caesar hath wept.

Ambition should be made of sterner stuff.

Yet Brutus says he was ambitious,

And Brutus is an honorable man.

You all did see that on the Lupercal

I thrice presented him a kingly crown,

Which he did thrice refuse. Was this ambition?

Yet Brutus says he was ambitious,

And, sure, he is an honorable man.

(No Fear: 3.2.90–98)

Irony:

Explanation:

5. The Funeral Speech: Orator

ANTONY

Good friends, sweet friends! Let me not stir you up
To such a sudden flood of mutiny.
They that have done this deed are honorable.
What private griefs they have, alas, I know not,
That made them do it. They are wise and honorable,
And will, no doubt, with reasons answer you.
I come not, friends, to steal away your hearts.
I am no orator, as Brutus is,
But, as you know me all, a plain blunt man
That love my friend. And that they know full well
That gave me public leave to speak of him.
For I have neither wit nor words nor worth,
Action nor utterance nor the power of speech,
To stir men's blood. I only speak right on.
I tell you that which you yourselves do know,
Show you sweet Caesar's wounds, poor poor dumb mouths[.]
(No Fear: 3.2.202–217)

Irony:

Explanation:

6. Cassius Believes Titinius Has Fallen

PINDARUS

Titinius is enclosed round about
With horsemen, that make to him on the spur.
Yet he spurs on. Now they are almost on him.
Now, Titinius. Now some light. Oh, he lights too.
He's ta'en.
(Shout Within)
And, hark! They shout for joy.

CASSIUS

Come down, behold no more.
Oh, coward that I am, to live so long
To see my best friend ta'en before my face!
(No Fear: 5.3.30–38)

Irony:

Explanation:

RL.9-10.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

RL.9-10.2 Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

RL.9-10.3 Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.