

# **The Twelve Caesars Study Guide**

## **The Twelve Caesars by Suetonius**

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# Plot Summary

The Twelve Caesars is probably the most in depth book ever written about the personal lives of the twelve caesars. Suetonius goes to great lengths to reveal the way these men really were, as human beings. Each emperor is dissected, and his actions beyond politics and professionalism revealed. The reader learns about their vices, their relationships with their wives, and their interaction with their own family members. After learning about the leaders' lives, their deaths and the events leading up to them are revealed, sometimes in great length. Every biography is rich with details and very personal. The book begins with Julius Caesar.

Suetonius takes the reader through the life of Julius Caesar by first revealing that his father died at an early age. He rises to become one of the greatest military leaders Rome ever has, and then becomes the greatest emperor. He is very loyal to all of his friends and family, unlike many of the other emperors. Augustus follows Julius Caesar and he too is a loyal person. Everything he does is to avenge Julius Caesar. He cares a lot about his reputation and the reputation of his family members, which is why he banishes his daughter Julia when she acts disgracefully in public. After his daughter cheats on Tiberius, he draws up divorce papers for them to end the marriage since Tiberius is going to be emperor eventually and cannot have her as a wife. Augustus is a very modest man and does not like too much public praise. He is also very forgiving and does not let it affect him when people speak badly of him, though he does fine them. When Augustus dies, Tiberius takes over, as Augustus planned. He is not a very good emperor and his personal vices are peculiar and even disturbing. People believe he is killed by Gaius with a poison.

Gaius is Tiberius' grandson and comes to power quickly and easily. The people generally like him, though he too has some peculiar habits, including sleeping with his sisters. He is killed after ruling for only three years. Claudius succeeds him, though nobody in his family prepares him for the political scene. Everyone says he is ugly, stupid, and slow and will never amount to anything. Despite the way his family treats him, he is very loyal to them and always seeks ways to honor Augustus. Nero comes to power after Claudius' mysterious death. Nero is an interesting emperor and was probably the most peculiar. He has a real love of and obsession with music. He performs often and forces people to watch him, threatening to punish them if they leave his recitals. People get really tired of Nero and living under his reign and disgusting habits, so he is ousted and killed.

Next comes Galba, who rules for only a few months before Otho has him overthrown and killed. Otho's reign is distinctive in that people believe he rules to set an example by reinstating the rightful government and justice that Rome deserves. Vitellius rules for a short while and is succeeded by Vespasian who is a good leader. He has two sons, Titus and Domitian. Titus is the good son who does a lot for Rome, Domitian is his jealous younger brother, always scheming against him. The Empire is better off once he is killed.



# Chapter 1, Gaius Julius Caesar

## Chapter 1, Gaius Julius Caesar Summary and Analysis

The Twelve Caesars is probably the most in depth book ever written about the personal lives of the twelve caesars. Suetonius goes to great lengths to reveal the way these men really were, as human beings. Each emperor is dissected, and his actions beyond politics and professionalism revealed. The reader learns about their vices, their relationships with their wives, and their interaction with their own family members. After learning about the leaders' lives, their deaths and the events leading up to them are revealed, sometimes in great length. Every biography is rich with details and very personal. The book begins with Julius Caesar.

Gaius Julius Caesar is nominated to the priesthood of Jupiter after his father dies as the next consulship is nominated to the priesthood of Jupiter. The Dictator, Sulla, tries to make Caesar divorce his wife Cornelia, who has borne him a daughter, Julia, but he refuses. This begins a long feud with Sulla. After a few years of military service and after Sulla's death, the Assembly grants Julius the rank of colonel and quickly helps undo Sulla's legislation, restores the tribunes of the people to their ancient power and reverses an order that exiled Caesar's brother-in-law Lucius Cinna.

One night Julius has a dream that he rapes his own mother. The soothsayers, or fortune-tellers, tell him this is a sign that he is "destined to conquer the earth, [the] Universal Mother." During his aedileship, a position above a quaestorship and below a praetorship (all are below the consul), he puts on great public shows securing the goodwill of the public and their tribunes.

In 62 BC he becomes a praetor and is appointed control over the province of Further Spain where he quickly restores order and returns to Rome the following summer to stand for a consulship. Though he legally cannot run, he joins forces with Bibulus. Bibulus bribes the voters, thus making Caesar and Bibulus consuls. Bibulus is more of a puppet and his input is frequently ignored. He is so frustrated by this that he stays home for the rest of his joint term and Caesar is able to govern alone.

Caesar marries Calpurnia after becoming praetor. He then betrothes his daughter Julia to Pompey. He thus secures the trust of Pompey by always asking for his input in government matters. Caesar then chooses to govern Gaul because it will bring him the most wealth. When Lucius Domitius Ahenobarbus stands for the consulship, he threatens to remove Caesar from his military command so Caesar asks Pompey to help him prolong his governorship of Gaul another five years and oppose Domitius' candidature to consul. He is able to expand his regular army, which he trains and equips in Roman style and at his own expense. In the nine years total that he governs Gaul, he obtains an annual tribute of 400,000 gold pieces, is the first to build a bridge across the Rhines which pushes the Germans out and makes them suffer heavy losses. He also invades Britain, defeating the natives.



After his daughter and mother die, he holds a large show and public banquet in his daughter's memory. To sustain his friendship with Pompey, he offers him his sister's granddaughter's hand and then asks Pompey if he can marry his daughter. He takes the same measures to win the esteem of kings and other authorities by giving them thousands of prisoners at a time and lending extra troops whenever they need them.

One day, while at the frontier between Gaul and Italy, he and his men notice an apparition sitting on the river bank. It grabs a trumpet from one of the trumpeters, runs down to the river, blows into the instrument, and crosses over the river. Caesar tells his men to accept the apparition as a sign from the Gods. It means they are supposed to go after the double-dealing enemy Pompey and his forces, who have recently betrayed him. Julius' army stands faithfully by him. They successfully march into Rome, summon the Senate to review the political situation and then quickly go off to Spain where Pompey's strongest forces are. Julius wins the battle swiftly. Pompey flees to Alexandria and is murdered by King Ptolemy XIII. Caesar then declares war against Ptolemy, is victorious, and hands the government of Egypt over to Queen Cleopatra.

He leads a series of victories and throughout the Civil War is never defeated. In one month he celebrates four triumphs with only a few days between each success. In the Pontic triumph, one of the decorated wagons carries the inscription "I CAME, I SAW, I CONQUERED!" to refer to the speed at which the previous battles had been won. Every infantryman is awarded a war gratuity in addition to those paid at the beginning of the wars, plus a farm. Every member of the commons receives grain and oil as a prize in addition to four gold pieces. All are welcomed to two very large banquets.

He then turns his attention to domestic reforms. He first reorganizes the calendar by inserting days and months, and makes each year correspond to the course of the sun, thus lengthening the year to 365 days. It had previously consisted of 355 days. He also adds an entire day every fourth year. He strengthens the senate by creating new patricians and increases the yearly quota of praetors, aediles, and quaestors, as well as minor officials. He also sets up the commons so that half of the magistrates will be popularly elected and the other half nominated by him. Caesar works very hard when it comes to judging cases, though at times he is severe.

He is a tall, fair and well built man with a broad face and dark brown eyes. He is generally healthy besides periodically suffering from epilepsy. He is very neat and keeps himself trimmed and shaved. He is bald, and self conscious about it, so he combs over the few hairs he has and constantly wears a laurel wreath.

He loves luxurious things, however, later on becomes ashamed of his luxuries and does not allow the sums to be entered in his accounts. He is a womanizer and has many affairs with numerous women including nobles such as Marcus Brutus' mother Servilia (rumored his favorite), and queens, the most famous being Queen Cleopatra of Egypt who bears him a son. His escapades with women are later legalized by a bill stating he can be married to any and every woman he wants for the purpose of bearing children. He also has relationship with King Nicomedes, a fact always thrown in his face by his enemies.



Caesar is one of the greatest speakers and generals the world has ever known. Cicero says he does not know another speaker more eloquent than Caesar. He also writes very well and his memoirs are gracefully composed and clearly written.

He is a skillful swordsman and horseman and has amazing endurance. If he reaches a river that his horse cannot cross, he simply swims across it himself. Sometimes he arrives at his destination before the messengers, which are sent ahead of him to announce his arrival. His fighting techniques are either carefully planned, or spur of the moment, when people do not expect him to fight, like during bad weather or after a long march. He judges his men by their fighting record and not by their morals or social position. He always tries to raise morale and keep the trust of his men by using a peculiar method. Instead of belittling the danger lying ahead, he exaggerates it and boasts about it more, which increases the glory that victory brings. Though he does not care about his troops' personal morals, he is not tolerant of deserters and punishes them severely. Caesar really loves his soldiers and always addresses them directly. He earns the devotion of his army. At the outbreak of the Civil War, not one Caesarean deserts the fight. When the soldiers are taken as prisoners, they prefer death over serving with the Pompeians. They do not care they are being fed grass instead of bread. When Pompey finds out about this he orders that the grass loaves be hidden so his men will not see they are fighting "wild beasts" and lose heart.

Caesar is also loyal and devoted to his dependants and his friends. Whenever he is given the opportunity, he resolves grudges and vendettas with his enemies. During the Civil War he acts with great compassion and says that "all who were not actively against him, were with him" as opposed to Pompey who says that all who are not with the government are against him. Towards the end of Caesar's career, he invites back all the exiles he has not pardoned yet and permits them to hold magistracies and armies. He even restores the statues of Sulla and Pompey that the city crowds tore down.

He is not so kind with the Senate, however and acts disrespectfully towards it often. Various rumors arise that he wants to revive the title of king for himself and that he wants to move the seat of government to Troy or Alexandria. More than sixty people band together against him and conspire to murder him. These men are led by Gaius Cassius, Marcus, and Decimus Brutus. There are a lot of signs that warn Caesar of his assassination. One is a dream he has where he is soaring through the clouds and shaking hands with Jupiter. His wife Calpurnia dreams that the gable ornament collapses and he lies stabbed in her arms. Warnings such as these and his failing health worry him. On the day of his murder, he decides to meet with the Senate, in spite of the warnings. On his way to the House, he is given a note with the details of the plot for his murder. He reads it and continues to the House. When he takes his seat, the conspirators stand around him. Tillius Cimber grabs his shoulders and one of the Casca brothers stabs him just below the throat. He tries getting away but he is confronted by all the men with daggers in their hands. He draws the top of his gown over his face and lets the lower part fall to his feet so that he will die with both legs covered. He is stabbed twenty three times. When Marcus Brutus delivers the second blow he says "You, too, my child?" Marcus Brutus' stab is the only deadly one.



Caesar's main heir is his son-in-law Pompey. He leaves the general public his gardens on the Tiber river banks for recreational use and gives each man three gold pieces. Marc Antony is supposed to give the formal eulogy, but instead has a messenger read a decree giving Caesar all the divine and human honors. Antony only speaks a few words before Caesar's body is cremated.

Many of his friends suspect that he did not do anything to prevent his death because of his failing health. Most agree that he welcomed dying the way he did because he wanted to go quickly and unexpectedly. He is fifty-five when he dies. None of his assassins live for more than three years after his death and all are condemned and die in different ways, some using the daggers they used on Caesar on themselves.



# Chapter 2, Augustus

## Chapter 2, Augustus Summary and Analysis

Augustus is the son of Gaius Octavius who Caesar adopts in his will. He is born on September 23, 63 BC. He comes of age at sixteen and is given military decorations when Caesar celebrates his Africa triumph. When Caesar goes to fight Pompey's sons in Spain, Augustus follows him with low security on enemy roads even though he is overcoming a serious illness. Caesar is really impressed with this and recognizes Augustus' strong and energetic character. He fights five civil wars and the main goal of every battle and military campaign is to avenge Caesar and keep his decrees in full force. He even makes plans to murder Antony. The senate ends up outlawing Antony after a few tenuous battles. Antony flees to Alexandria to be with Cleopatra but Augustus finds him and forces him to commit suicide. He then turns Egypt into a Roman province and becomes increasingly unpopular. Augustus never invades another country because he does not feel the need to increase the Empire's boundaries nor enhance his military glory.

Augustus introduces many reforms into the Army such as reviving obsolete practices and exacting the strictest discipline. He goes so far as to limit his generals time with their wives to winter only. When the Civil Wars are over he stops addressing the troops as comrades and starts calling them soldiers, thinking the term too flattering. He strongly condemns speed and carelessness during wars and never goes into battle unless the chance for victory are greater than the chance for defeat.

His most famous public works are his Forum with the Temple of Avenging Mars, the Palatine Temple of Apollo, and the Temple of Jupiter on the Capitoline Hill. He divides the city into districts and wards and appoints magistrates to watch over the districts and locally elected supervisors to watch over the wards. He also restores ruined and burned temples, making them more beautiful than before. He also changes the calendar back to what it used to be and renames the month Sextilis, "August," Sextilis being the month he won his first Consulship.

After the Civil Wars, Augustus stations armed police around high crime neighborhoods, has slave barracks inspected, and dissolves workmen's guilds to try to stop crime. He is very diligent when deciding cases and stays up until daybreak. He also judges cases from home if he is too sick to go in to work. During debates he stops calling on people based on rank and randomly calls people out to speak so that everyone will be on their toes. He creates new governmental offices so that more people will have the opportunity to experience government and also revives the office of Censors and increases the number of praetors.

Augustus is generous when it comes to recognizing military talent and lets Senators' sons familiarize themselves with the administration before their military careers begin so they can gain plenty of experience. Unlike Julius Caesar, Augustus cares about the





morality of his soldiers and gives them all background checks. If they have done anything immoral they are punished.

Augustus always holds very large and spectacular shows, though he segregates the spectators into soldiers and civilians, and assigns special seats to married people, young boys and their tutors, and women (who are confined to the back rows except for the Vestal Virgins which have seating facing the praetor's tribunal). No women are allowed at gladiatorial games.

He standardizes the pay of the entire army to discourage them from revolting for more money once they retire. He is not extreme when people speak badly about him and lets them off with fines only, instead of having them executed. He never punishes anyone for speaking their mind and showing independence, not even in the senate.

He is also rather modest and is horrified and insulted when people called him "my lord." One time at a show, an actor says the words "O just and generous Lord!" and the entire audience rises and applauds as if it refers to him. He is so upset by this that he issues a very strong reprimand and makes it illegal for even his adopted children and grandchildren to call him lord even as a joke. He slowly becomes more modest and paranoid. He never leaves the city during times when people might be forced to give him a formal hello or goodbye because it makes him feel uncomfortable. These acts of modesty make the public like him a lot more. The people want to give him the title "Father of the Country," and the Senate agrees, even though Augustus has turned down the request once before. He is very moved and says "Fathers of the Senate, I have at last achieved my highest ambition. What more can I ask of the immortal gods than that they may permit me to enjoy your approval until my dying day?"

In regards to his private life, he first marries Claudia who is Mark Antony's daughter. They divorce when he gets in a fight with her mother. He then marries Scribonia but divorces her because he cannot stand the way she nags him and then marries Livia Drusilla whom he truly loves. He has a daughter named Julia with Scribonia, but unfortunately cannot have any children with Livia. His daughter Julia has two sons, Gaius and Lucius that he adopts as his own sons and teaches them all they need to know about government while they are young. He later sends them as commanders in chief to provinces when they are only consuls elect, or consular candidates. He then adopts his step son Tiberius and his last grandson Agrippa Postumus.

He is very controlling of his daughter and granddaughters. He does not let them have any friends that he does not approve of. He is very proud of his family's upbringing, though this comes back to stab him in the back when he finds out that his daughter is indulging in "vices" and he banishes her. He is more worried about his family's reputation than their own deaths. When Gaius and Lucius die, he does not mourn for very long and goes about his normal routine soon after their funerals. However when he finds out about his daughter's love affairs, he refuses to see anyone for days. He keeps her banished to an island for five years then moves her to the mainland where she is given a bit more liberty. He often refers to her as a boil or running sore on his body.



Augustus is very cautious of people and never rushes into a friendship. Once he makes a friend, he keeps him for life and treats him very well. He is very honorable to them and if they list him as an heir to part of their belongings, he quickly turns it over to his friend's grown up children or saves it until the children are grown. Then he turns over the money with interest.

Augustus is guilty of various improprieties and is accused of sleeping with Julius Caesar. He often commits adultery, mainly with his enemies because he wants to understand them better by sleeping with their wives or daughters. He has a reputation of being a womanizer and as an elderly man likes sleeping with young virgins. They are collected for him from every Roman quarter, and even his wife helps find them.

His personal habits are very simple and his first home very modest. His furnishings are very simple and are not even considered fit for a private citizen. He sleeps on a low bed with an ordinary coverlet and wears simple clothing. He is a very handsome man, but he does not care much about his appearance. He lets his hair grow so long that it takes three barbers to groom him before he makes an appearance anywhere. Augustus survives many dangerous illnesses. He has kidney stones, abscesses on his liver, a bad leg that makes him limp at times, and arthritis.

As a speaker, he is very simple and avoids fancy wording, getting his point across easily and quickly. In order to avoid embarrassment, he always writes his speeches down and reads them.

Augustus believes in signs and thinks that if he puts his right foot in his left shoe it is bad luck and if it drizzles a bit just before setting out on a long journey then it is good luck. There are many signs that tell people he is destined to be ruler. For instance, one story tells of his mother at the Temple of Apollo for midnight service. She falls asleep and a snake penetrates her. She wakes up, cleans herself but finds a colored mark the shape of a serpent on her body. Nine months later, Augustus is born and everyone believes it is divine paternity. When an astrologer hears the time of day he is delivered he says "the ruler of the world is now born." People also believe he once silenced a bunch of croaking frogs by simply telling them to stop and not one frog has croaked in that spot every since. When he is older and celebrating his coming of age, the seams of his gown, borrowed from Caesar, fall to his feet. The people say this is a sign that the Senatorial Order will also be brought to his feet someday.

Augustus eventually grows very ill and rests in Capreae. On return to Rome, he grows more ill and says his goodbyes to Tiberius. He dismisses his visitors, kisses his wife and says "Goodbye, Livia: never forget our marriage." He dies almost immediately after that. He is given the rightful funeral procession and two eulogies are read, one by Tiberius and the other by Drusus.

In his will he gives the bulk of his estate to Tiberius and Livia and both are to adopt the name Augustus and Augusta. He makes sure that the rest of his family are taken care of and even gives money to the state. However, he makes sure his daughter is excluded from being buried in the mausoleum with him.



# Chapter 3, Tiberius

## Chapter 3, Tiberius Summary and Analysis

Tiberius is Augustus' step son. His real father surrenders his wife Livia to Augustus after trying and failing to keep her away from him. Augustus adopts Tiberius and his brother Drusus.

Tiberius first marries Vipsania Agrippina, the daughter of one of Augustus' admirals, but after giving him a son, she becomes pregnant again very quickly and he has to divorce her. He ends up marrying Julia, Augustus' daughter, and is very upset because of her bad reputation. He regrets his divorce, and one day when he sees Vipsania, he follows her home with tears in his eyes. Heavy precautions are taken to keep them apart. After his baby with Julia dies, he leaves her and when Augustus banishes her, divorce papers are drawn up for them.

He becomes quaestor, praetor, and consul very quickly and always before he is legally old enough for the positions. However he is not very politically ambitious and decides to retire and withdraw completely from government work. After years of being away from Rome, Augustus does everything possible to advance Tiberius' political career and reputation. He is given three years of tribunician power and is to pacify Germany. He has to suppress the Illyrian revolt and though he has few supplies, he eventually forces them into complete submission.

Tiberius is always very strict with his soldiers. Soon after the Illyrian revolt, the Consuls give Tiberius joint control over the provinces with Augustus. Neither are very thrilled by this, though it is rumored Augustus likes the idea of Tiberius succeeding him, only because after he dies it will make the people miss him even more.

When Augustus dies, Tiberius wastes no time accepting imperial power and quickly requests a bodyguard. Nobody is really happy with him as emperor and Germany does not recognize him at all. All these feelings pass quickly, however, and he is very modest at the beginning of his career. He never accepts any high honors and vetoes all bills that would set up busts and statues of him. He also declines being called Father of the Country, and Imperator. When someone addresses him as "My Lord and Master" he gives a warning that no one should ever insult him in that way again. He also does not care about what others say or think about him. He only intervenes in state matters when abuses have to be checked and he fixes and limits the amount of money for public entertainment by giving actors pay cuts and setting a limit on gladiatorial combats during all festivals. He is very frugal, and even serves leftovers for dinner so nothing goes to waste.

Tiberius revives the ancient custom of punishing scandalous married women. He also abolishes foreign cults and makes all Egyptians and Jews burn their religious idols. He even expels the Jews and astrologers to far out regions of the empire.



In his first two years as leader, he never goes outside of Rome. After his son Drusus died, he retires to Campania where everyone swears he will remain and die. He tries governing from afar for a while but that does not work. Returning to Caprae, he lets things get so out of hand that all state affairs are completely in ruins. He does not fill any vacancies in the Equestrian Order, he does not establish governorships for the provinces, or make new senior military post appointments. He lets the Germans invade Gaul, the Dacians and Sarmatians ravage Moesia, and the Parthians overrun Aermia. These are considered very dishonorable things to do.

He finally secludes himself from everything and everyone and once he feels he is no longer in the public eye he falls into all the passions he once had to hide. He is a heavy drinker and a heavy eater. He makes a private sporting house where he can engage in all his sexual extravagances. He gathers girls and young men to copulate in front of him and even makes them dress up as Pans and Nymphs prostituting themselves in front of caverns and grottoes. Once, when summoning a woman to his room, he disgusts her so thoroughly that she goes home and stabs herself to death.

He does not create any magnificent public works, and hardly attends any public shows. He is very hostile to his family and believes his mother is against him. He hates being referred to as the Son of Livia and the Son of Augustus. He always argues with his mother and he grows so annoyed with her that, when she dies, he does not attend her funeral. He annuls her will and then starts taking revenge on all of her friends and confidants. Tiberius does not have paternal feelings for his sons either and when his son Drusus dies he goes back to his usual business as soon as the funeral is over. He discounts all of his son Germanicus' successes. He says that his son's victories are completely ineffective and too expensive for the country. Though he recommends his grandchildren, Nero and Drusus, to the Senate and celebrates their coming of age parties, he later declares publicly that he does not like them very much and makes false accusations about them. The Senate declares them public enemies and starves them to death.

Tiberius is very blood thirsty and people who have known him since childhood say his evil tendencies were visible at a young age. People call him a cruel monster. People are executed for things such as beating their own slaves, changing their clothes too close to a statue of Augustus, and even carrying a coin with Augustus' head on it into a brothel. Once, when a fisherman scares him by offering a large mullet he caught. Tiberius has his guards rub his face in the fish. When the fisherman says "thank Heaven, I did not bring Caesar that huge crab I also caught!" Tiberius sends his men to get the crab and has them rub that into the poor man's face too. This terror goes on for years and it begins to take a toll on him. He even sends a letter to the Senate stating that he knows he will end up in eternal damnation.

He lacks regard for the gods and other religious things and believes the world is completely ruled by fate. He is very devoted to Greek and Latin literature but his own speeches are known to be very bad—fake, exaggerated and too concerned with formal rules and not enough about genuine issues. The speeches he gives without preparation



are usually better than the ones he plans ahead for because they lack all the added exaggerations.

After his retirement, he attempts to return to Rome twice. The second time, he leaves because he is warned by a soothsayer that there is a mob waiting to kill him. He hurries back to Campania, but gets very sick. He dies soon afterwards in a country house at the age of seventy-seven after reigning for almost twenty-three years. Some people believe that Gaius, one of his grandsons, gave him a slow acting poison. News of his death brings great celebration to Rome. In his will he leaves Gaius and Tiberius the majority of his fortune and states that if one of them should die the survivor would be the sole heir.



# Chapter 4, Gaius (Caligula)

## Chapter 4, Gaius (Caligula) Summary and Analysis

Gaius Caesar is born on August 31, AD 12, and is one of Tiberius' grandsons. He is given the surname Caligula as a joke because he grows up among the army troops and wears a miniature private soldier uniform. He inherits a bit of his grandfather's brutality. At a young age he already loves to watch tortures and executions and will go out into town disguised to engage in "gluttonous and adulterous" actions.

Gaius is welcomed as Emperor very quickly and happily after Tiberius' death. He is very popular and strives to keep his popularity high. Gaius is very devoted to the memory of his brother and mother and after giving a very heartfelt speech at Tiberius' funeral, goes to fetch his family members' remains. He is very devoted to his sisters and includes them in daily addresses. He recalls all the people who were exiled and dismisses their criminal charges. Gaius is very generous to the public and holds spectacular gladiatorial games.

He completes the projects Tiberius started, including the Temple of Augustus and Pompey's Theatre, and begins building the Tiber district aqueduct. He adopts many titles, including "Father of the Army," "Best and Greatest of Caesars," and "Son of the Camp."

Tiberius is not without faults however. He makes it a habit to sleep with each of his three sisters at large banquets while his wife sleeps. He loves his wife Caesonia the most, though she has three daughters from a previous marriage and is very promiscuous. He does not marry her until she bears him a child. They have a daughter, and he knows it is his daughter because of her temper.

He is equally disrespectful to members of the Senate and the people of Rome. During gladiatorial shows he removes the canopies during really hot days and forbids the people to leave, forcing them to endure the hot sun. He is so evil he makes parents watch their children's executions. He does not care how cruel he is. He merely says "Let them hate me, so long as they fear me."

He is a very extravagant man and invents new kinds of baths, different drinks and dishes, baths in richly perfumed bath oils, and even drinks pearls dissolved in vinegar. He says that a "man must either be frugal, or Caesar," and this is his justification. When he is short on cash, he increases taxes, makes false accusations to raise funds, and holds auctions. He auctions off whatever he can and raises the prices so high (while forcing people to bid) that many are financially ruined and commit suicide. He ends up auctioning off the furnishings of the Old Palace as well and shames bidders for being richer than he is. Gaius even establishes brothels and stocks them with married women and young boys and invites men of all ages to come, enjoy themselves, and spend money.



Gaius suffers from epilepsy and knows that he is mentally ill. He is an insomniac and never sleeps more than three hours a night which is probably because he suffers from night terrors and nightmares. His mental illness probably accounts for his overconfidence and his severe insecurities which are most likely bi-polar disorder. He does, however, give good speeches and is very witty and eloquent. Though he is cruel most of the time, he does a few people and those lucky few are showered with gifts and kisses, such as Mnester, a male comedian. Anybody who disrupts his act is punished.

There are many omens that point to Gaius' murder. For instance, The Capitol at Capua is struck by lightning on the Ides of March, and on the night before his murder, he dreams he is standing next to Jupiter's throne when the god kicks him and sends him tumbling down to earth. There are two stories of his death. One is that Charea, a colonel, comes up behind him as he is talking to some boys and stabs him in the neck, then another Colonel, Cornelius, stabs him in the chest. The other version is that Charea splits his jawbone and when he yells "strike again!", Charea stabs and slices him thirty more times, including thrusting a sword through his genitals.

Gaius dies at twenty-nine after ruling for only three years, ten months and eight days. His body is only half cremated and moved to the Lamian Gardens. His sisters later completely cremate him and put him in a proper tomb. Caesonia his wife is murdered as well as their daughter. Nobody believes that he is really dead and people are scared to react because they think he probably made up his own death, just to see how they would react so he can punish them.



# Chapter 5, Claudius

## Chapter 5, Claudius Summary and Analysis

Claudius is the son of Drusus, and the grandson of Augustus. He is never expected to be a Caesar because everyone always says he is dumb, weak and ugly. His mother often calls him a monster and a man that "Nature had not finished." Livia his grandmother never addresses him personally and is always horrible to him. When someone predicts that he will be emperor one day, his sister prays that such a "cruel and underserved" punishment never occur to the Roman people. He spends most of his life in an obscure and idle suburban mansion in Campania after renouncing all hope of being a politician. He is a heavy drinker and loves to gamble. One thing is clear though, he never loses the respect of the people.

Claudius becomes emperor by accident. When he hears that Gaius has been murdered, he is so scared that he hides behind a curtain. A guardsman goes looking for him and sees his two feet peaking out. The guardsman exposes him and Claudius drops to the floor as the guard proclaims him emperor. The people sincerely want him to be emperor and demand that he accept the position. He finally does and has his guards pledge allegiance to him and give them all one hundred fifty gold pieces. He is the first Caesar to purchase the loyalty of his troops.

He is a simple leader at first and is very loyal to his family, never missing a chance to honor Augustus. He has the love of the people early on. During gladiatorial games he stands and applauds with the audience and claps and shouts along with them during the shows. This makes him seem humble and adds to his popularity. There are plots against his life however. First a commoner tries to stab him, then a group of his slaves try to kill him, and finally a civil war begins, though it is over in less than five days.

He holds four consulships and is a very conscientious judge. He strives to be fair and when he feels that sentences are too harsh or lenient, he changes them himself. However if someone is found guilty of a really shocking crime, he exceeds the legal penalty and condemns them to the wild beasts. He tries to be a good Consul, but at times he is thoughtless and hasty and sometimes downright foolish. One time he even says that he decides "in favor of the party which [had] told the truth."

He is very interested in keeping the city clean and ensuring the grain supplies arrive on time. When bad weather causes a grain shortage, a mob pelts and curses him in the Forum. From then on he takes all necessary steps to import grain, even during winter months, as insurance against bad weather. His public works are few but very important. He finishes an aqueduct started by Gaius, drains the Fucine Lake and builds the Harbor of Ostia. He also brings cool springs into the city of Rome that go into ornamental reservoirs. He is very generous to the people and gives them lots of public shows and gifts. During these shows he always encourages the people to have a great time and enjoy themselves, addressing them as Lords.





He first marries Plautia Uruglanilla but divorces her for scandalous behavior, then marries Aelia Paetina, then Valeria Messalina, his cousin's daughter, though he has her executed for disgraceful behavior. He decides he will stop marrying and live a celibate life. This however does not last long and he marries Agrippina his niece, later making it legal to marry nieces without it counting as incest. He has five children from all his wives and often parades his son Britannicus amongst the troops where they all wish him luck in his military career.

Claudius is very paranoid and rumors against him almost cause him to step down as emperor. Tensions begin to rise in his family and he regrets marrying Agrippina. He is quick to let Britannicus grow up and pushes up his coming of age party, having it early because he is tall enough to wear the toga of manhood. He dies soon after writing his will and people think he was poisoned though no one knows for sure. According to many people, he loses his ability to speak and is in really bad pain throughout the night, dying just before dawn. His death is not announced until Nero's position as emperor is secured. He is given an official funeral and the great honor of being deified, though Nero cancels this honor after he takes over.



# Chapter 6, Nero

## Chapter 6, Nero Summary and Analysis

Nero is Agrippina's son, one of Claudius' wives and nieces. Claudius adopts Nero when he is ten years old and restores all the wealth Gaius took from him as soon as Claudius becomes emperor. He turns over all of his public and private affairs to Agrippina and she often rides with him through the streets. He too starts out quite generous and never misses a change to show how merciful he is. When he has to sign execution orders he sighs and says "Ah, how I wish that I had never learned to write!" He is good with names and always greets everyone he knows when out and about.

During his reign he is intolerable of many public abuses. He severely punishes the Christians, which are a new religious sect at the time, and even expels pantomime actors from the city. He has no ambition to extend the boundaries of the Roman Empire and even considers taking his forces out of Britain. He only plans two foreign tours, one to Alexandria and the other to Greece.

Nero loves music and begins training at an early age. He sings and takes lyre lessons and goes to such extremes to strengthen his voice that he would lie on his back with a slab of lead on his chest, use enemas to keep his weight down, and not eat apples or other food considered bad for his vocal chords. Nero's voice turns out feeble and husky despite all of his efforts, though he still starts to showcase his voice and enters competitions and recitals. During these recitals, people are not allowed to leave. The audience often falls asleep and some women even give birth during his shows. He has really bad stage fright, is severely jealous of his rivals and always in awe of the judges.

Nero has many vices. During the night, he makes his rounds at local taverns and prowls the streets looking for trouble. One of his games is to attack men while they are going home to dinner, stabbing them if they resist, then dropping their bodies in the sewers. He also breaks into shops and robs them and then later opens a shop of his own and sells the stolen goods. Once he even molests a senator's wife and is almost beaten to death by her husband. This teaches him to always take a body guard with him. He eventually gets worse and stops trying to hide his horrible vices. He starts out seducing free born boys and married women, but he grows tired of them and rapes Rubria, a Vestal Virgin. Even more disturbing, he castrates a boy named Sporus so that he can marry him, then takes him to his palace where he "treated him as his wife" with a full audience.

He is not very good to the women in his life. He tries killing his mother on several occasions, poisoning her three times. He finally sends someone to kill her, and is always haunted by her ghost. He has three wives total, one of which he kicks to death while she is pregnant because she complains he comes home too late from the races. It is no surprise that he is even worse with strangers. He even sets part of Rome on fire because he is "disgusted with the drab old buildings."



The Gauls become desperate and attack Nero after fourteen years of his rule. They are lead by Galba. Nero knows he cannot win against Galba and tears his clothes while he beats his forehead crying. He is so irrational that his initial military preparations are to find enough wagons to carry his stage equipment and get his concubines ready. He tries escaping, but is unsuccessful. He is finally so loathed by everyone that the Senate declares him a public enemy and says they will execute him "in ancient style" once he is caught. Ancient style means he will be stripped naked, his head thrust in a wooden fork, and then flogged to death with rods. He commits suicide by stabbing himself in the throat, with the help of his secretary because he is too cowardly to do it himself. One of his last requests is for Sporus to mourn him. He dies at thirty-one years old. Everyone is so excited that the citizens run through the streets rejoicing.



# Chapter 7, Galba

## Chapter 7, Galba Summary and Analysis

The Julian line becomes extinct with Nero's death and Galba rises to power. He comes from an aristocratic house and it is believed that Augustus saw him one day as a boy, pinched his cheek and said "you too will taste a little power, child." Then one day while his grandfather is invoking a sacrificial lightning, an eagle comes and takes the entrails that he holds in his hands and takes them to an oak tree full of acorns. A bystander says this is a sign that will bring great honor to the family.

Galba dedicates his time to liberal studies and is very skilled in law. He takes marriage seriously and only has one wife, Lepida, who bears him two sons. Sadly, his family dies and he remains single for the rest of his life. He has his first public appointment while he is still under age and is urged to take power after Gaius' murder, but he refuses and earns the respect of Claudius. Galba wins triumphal awards for his military achievements in Africa but from then until Nero's death he lives mainly in retirement, never going anywhere without an escort. He is offered a governorship in Spain which he takes and purposely remains inactive so Nero cannot find any reason to punish him.

When Nero dies the citizens swear obedience to Galba and he assumes the title of Caesar. Galba has two main characteristics. One is cruelty, and the other is greed. Townships that are slow to receive him as Emperor are punished with severe taxes and their buildings torn down. His ascension is not popular everywhere and this is evident from the first show he attends. He sentences Senators and knights to death without any trials on the smallest bits of evidence and hardly ever grants applications for Roman citizenship.

A soothsayer begins warning him that he will be murdered soon. When Otho seizes the Guards' Camp, Galba continues to ignore the warnings. One of his soldiers claims that Otho has been killed, and when Galba runs out into the street a mob attacks him, his followers abandon him and he is butchered. He is murdered by the Curian pool and a private soldier returning from the grain decapitates him, stuffs the head in his cloak and takes it to Otho with his thumb stuck in the mouth. Galba is seventy-two years old and reigns a mere seven months.



# Chapter 8, Otho

## Chapter 8, Otho Summary and Analysis

Otho is born on April 25, AD 32. He is beaten a lot as a child because he is so wild, and when he gets older he captures drunken wanderers and throws them in blankets. He ends up using an older woman to get connected with Nero and with her help becomes Nero's favorite confidant. Nero has taken Poppaea Sibina from her husband to be his mistress, and makes Otho her protector. Otho ends up falling in love with her and Nero banishes him to Lusitania, making him governor. He governs Lusitania for ten years and takes the first chance he can to take revenge on Nero by joining forces with his enemy, Galba. Though Otho does all he can to please Galba to try to get adopted by him, Galba chooses Piso as an adopted son instead. Otho is so upset by this that he stages Galba and Piso's murders. Once they are killed, his friend finds him and hoists him onto his shoulder, congratulating him for being the new emperor. The people in the streets are overjoyed and swear their allegiance.

The armies of Germany do not acknowledge him as their leader and instead pledge their loyalty to Vitellius. He asks Vitellius to adopt him so that they can rule together, but Vitellius has already sent his army to Rome. Otho quickly sends out his troops, without them realizing they are going to fight. They think they are going for peace talks. Otho realizes he cannot win and decides to commit suicide because he does not want to risk any more of the brave soldiers' lives in a battle they cannot win. He believes they deserve a better fate. He stabs himself once below his heart and dies quickly. The soldiers present kiss his dead hands and feet, weeping and praising him for being the bravest man they had ever known and the best emperor ever. They too commit suicide. In the end, everyone believes he killed Galba not because he wanted to be emperor, but because he wanted to restore the country's liberty and rightful system of government.



# Chapter 9, Vitellius

## Chapter 9, Vitellius Summary and Analysis

Publius Vitellius is a knight and steward to Augustus and the grandfather of Aulus Vitellius the emperor. Vitellius is born on September 7, AD 14. He spends his childhood as one of Tiberius' male prostitutes and is said to have secured his father's first advancement to public office by giving up his chastity. He grows up among all the previous Caesars and is admired by many of them for his chariot driving, his skills in playing dice, and is indebted to Nero for a service that goes unmentioned. His popularity with the emperors wins him public offices and important priesthoods. He is Governor of Africa and curator of Public Works as well.

The population has a good opinion of him since he greets everyone, including private soldiers with hugs. Less than a month after Galba's death, he is named emperor by his soldiers. After sending his troops after Otho and after hearing that he has actually committed suicide, he disbands all battalions in Rome, accusing them of a disgraceful lapse in discipline. This raises hopes that he will be a good emperor.

Vitellius is a very extravagant and cruel man. He is a glutton and has at least three or four large banquets a day. His cruelty is severe and he kills anyone over the smallest thing. Once he kills a person who asks him for a glass of water by bringing him the water with poison in it. When a prophet of Chatti tells him that he will live long and reign securely if he outlives his mother, he starves his mother to death when she falls ill.

During the eighth month of his reign, the Moesian and Pannonian legions go against him and pledge their allegiance to Vespasian. When he announces that he will send troops into battle against Vespasian, the people became enraged. The Senate does not agree to help him and when Vespasian's forces are near he plans to escape to Campania but ends up hiding in a closet inside the palace. He is found by the enemies and begs them not to kill him. Instead they tie his hands behind his back, tie a noose around his neck, and drag him to the Forum. They torture him by giving him little cuts all over his body and then kill him. Afterwards they drag his body to the Tiber river and throw it in. He dies at fifty-six years old. His brother and son are also killed.



# Chapter 10, Vespasian

## Chapter 10, Vespasian Summary and Analysis

Vespasian is part of the Flavian family and is born on November 17, AD 9. When Claudius becomes emperor, Vespasian goes to Britain where he fights thirty battles and restrains two tribes, capturing more than twenty towns. He also governs Africa where he rules with dignity and justice. He tours Greece with Nero, but offends him when he falls asleep during one of his shows.

His imperial ambition surfaces again after Nero and Galba are both dead and Otho and Vitellius are battling. An omen states that civil war will break out in Italy and that Vespasian will fight against the war. One day a dog brings a human hand and drops it under the table where Vespasian is sitting, a hand being a sign of great power. He also dreams that his family will prosper after Nero loses a tooth, and the following day a dentist comes to him with a tooth he has just extracted from Nero. He is patient and waits for the perfect moment to make his move.

Three things facilitate Vespasian's ascension. The first is a letter from Otho begging him to avenge his death by becoming emperor, though the letter is believed to be forged. The second is a rumor that Vitellius planned to transfer troops from Germany to the Orient. The Third is a promise to give Vespasian Syria's army and the support of Vologaesius, King of the Parthians, who promises him forty thousand archers. Vespasian then starts a new civil war after Vitellius is assassinated in Rome.

He is not a natural emperor and at first he feels unprepared to lead. These feelings eventually go away when he heals a blind man and a lame man with the curative powers he does not know he has. One of the first things he does is allow people to take over the burned buildings in Rome as their own and make them over. He then starts working on several new buildings, including two temples and the famous Coliseum that still stands to this day. He reforms the Senatorial and Equestrian Orders weakened by neglect and murders, and judges a long list of lawsuits that have been ignored. No innocent person is ever punished during his reign and he always settles old scores.

His one vice is that he is very greedy and levies very strong taxes on the people. However, he spends the money on good things. He is very generous to all the different classes of people in Rome. He even helps some financially who are too poor to hold official positions. People say he is always good natured and always has time for his friends whom he welcomes to talk to him in the morning while getting dressed. His sense of humor remains even when he becomes very ill and knows he will die. Though he is gravely ill he still goes on with his imperial duties until he has a bad attack of diarrhea and nearly faints. He stands up, saying that all men should die on their feet, and collapses in the arms of his attendants and dies. He is sixty-nine years old.



# Chapter 11 & 12 Titus and Domitian

## Chapter 11 & 12 Titus and Domitian Summary and Analysis

Titus is one of Vespasian's sons. Vespasian tells the Senate that either his son will rule or nobody will. Titus has to earn the adoration and love of the people because before his ascension he is hated by everyone. When his father is still alive, he becomes his protector and companion and is given control of the guards, only previously been given to a knight. He too has a reputation for greed. His dinner parties are very extravagant and he holds riotous parties with his friends.

He shows the greatest respect for private property and never takes anything away from the citizens. During gladiatorial shows he lets the audience choose what they want to watch and keeps his word to honor all requests. When he judges cases, he always makes sure that the petitioners know their case will be heard and dealt with, especially if he is going to rule in their favor. He also establishes a double jeopardy law where nobody can be tried for the same crime twice.

His reign is filled with many natural catastrophes including the eruption of Mount Vesuvius, a fire that burns for three days and nights in Rome and one of the worst plague outbreaks ever. His brother is another catastrophe for him, plotting against Titus' life several times. Titus dies in the same country house his father died in, at the age of forty one, though it does not say how. Everyone is saddened and goes into mourning.

Domitian is always plotting against his brother and puts on a fake persona in front of people to try to gain their trust. He even pretends to have a passion for poetry, which he later neglects and openly hates. When his father dies, he wants to give his troops double what Titus gives and alleges that his father's will must had been tampered with because he was only given half of the empire.

At the beginning of his reign he often spends his days catching and stabbing flies with a pen. Fear of assassination and lack of money make him cruel and greedy. He tries hard to gain the public's trust and be a good leader. He is very diligent in dispensing justice and cuts down on government office abuse. However, this is shortlived and his cruel streak emerges. He puts many senators to death, accusing them of conspiracy.

After he wins the civil war, he grows even more cruel. He tortures prisoners, burning their genitals to get information out of them. Only two leaders pardon him after his evil tactics. He realizes that he is becoming increasingly unpopular and allows the public to choose the sentence of some condemned people to try to gain their love back.

He creates a new building program, adds shows for entertainment, and increases the army's pay. This exhausts his resources and he ends up downsizing the military. People finally begin to plot against him and his own friends and freedmen conspire to murder





him. When his murderer goes in to kill him, he puts up a fight but is no match for the assassin. He dies at the age of forty-four after reigning for fifteen years. Before he dies he admits that the "Empire would be richer and happier when he had gone."



# Characters

## Julius Caesar

Julius is one of the most known and recognized Caesars. He is a strong and well built man, though he is balding and combs the hair on the side of his head forward to conceal his baldness. He also tries to wear the laurel wreath on his head every chance that he gets. He is very loyal to his soldiers and refers to them as his comrades. He spends a lot of time and his own money making them the best fighting force they can be. He loves his family as well and goes to great lengths to honor his mother and daughter after they die. He holds some of the greatest shows and is beloved by the people. One of his first accomplishments is controlling Gaul, which he does before he even becomes Consul, and afterwards is able to ascend the political ladder very quickly. He always tries to settle old scores with his enemies. After he kills Pompey, his biggest enemy, he offers his daughter in marriage to Pompey's son. When she dies, he asks to marry Pompey's daughter in order to maintain the alliance. He is not very respectful of the senate however, because he does not feel they act in the best interest of the state. He often ignores them and goes against their advice. The senate tires of this and ends up conspiring to kill him.

## Augustus

Augustus is one of the most beloved emperors and the head of the family for almost the rest of the Caesars after him. Everything he does is to avenge Julius Caesar and bring great honor to the empire. He works a bit differently, however. He is more professional towards the army, rather than affectionate as Julius Caesar had been. He greatly cares about the morals of the soldiers and punishes them for any and every moral offense. He is also very concerned with his own image and that of his family. He takes great pride in his family's name and their upbringing. His biggest shame is that his daughter Julia is less than honorable and takes part in scandalous vices, including cheating on her husband Tiberius. He ends up banishing her to an island for her actions and forbids her being buried in the family mausoleum. Augustus does not try to expand the empire, rather his main goal is to uphold its integrity. The Caesars that follow him were all either blood relatives, or adopted by him. His bloodline end with Nero, whose only daughter is killed.

## Tiberius

Tiberius is not an honorable emperor. He shows no interest in politics, then, after Augustus dies, he steps up as his stepson wishes he would, and takes over. He does nothing spectacular and is rather lazy when it comes to ruling, even letting other provinces invade parts of the Roman Empire. He goes into seclusion so he can freely



engage in his sexual vices. People believe Gaius gave him a slow acting poison to kill him.

## **Claudius**

Claudius is the one emperor not given an easy pass to leadership, nor does he kill anyone to become emperor. His entire family is cruel to him and all say he is ugly, slow, and worthless. He ends up being one of Rome's favorite leaders, but his vices get the better of him in the end. One of his faults is trusting his wife and freedmen too much and they all use him like a puppet. It is believed that he was poisoned, perhaps by his wife, but nobody knows for sure.

## **Nero**

Definitely one of the stranger emperors, Nero is a very cruel leader. He loves music and holds shows forcing people to listen to him. He has many horrible vices, including being unfaithful, and has so little respect for everything and everyone around him that he even rapes the Vestal Virgin Rubria and kills his own mother. The world tires of Nero and Galba sends in troops to kill him. The Senate turns against him as well and he ends up committing suicide. The Julian house stops with Nero since his only heir is a daughter and she is killed after his death.

## **Galba**

Galba is one the first emperors that does not belong to the Julian house. He is very cruel and does not last very long in office. He is overthrown by Otho shortly after taking control over the Empire.

## **Otho**

Otho is loved by all of the people, except the German are which had pledged allegiance to Vitellius after Galba's death. Most people believe that he took office not because he wanted to rule, but because he wanted to restore honor to Rome and stop the tyrants that had led before him.

## **Vitellius**

Though he does not do much during his short reign, he is hated throughout it. He is a very greedy and gluttonous man. He has his own mother starved to death because a fortune teller tells him he will live long and prosper if he outlives her. He dies a torturous death and his body is thrown in the Tiber River.



## Vespasian

Vespasian is a good emperor for the most part, as his reign is not full of unjust murders and cruel tactics. He is good to the people and does a lot to restore the city of Rome.

## Titus

Titus is the better of Vespasian's sons. He is loved by all the people and is generally a good leader, though it takes the public a while to accept him. He does a lot of good and is very honest and respectable towards the public. His brother hates him however and is always plotting against him. Titus sees major catastrophes during his reign, including a volcano eruption, a horrible plague, and a fire that lasts three days and nights.

## Domitian

Domitian is Vespasian's other son. He is naturally unkind and does all he can to gain power. He never respects his brother and is always trying to get him killed.

## Julia

Augustus' daughter, she is very promiscuous and never pleases her father. Many times he wishes she were dead. She is banished to an island for years, then is allowed to come back to the mainland. She marries Tiberius, though they are divorced by Augustus after she is unfaithful to him. When her father dies, he ensures that she will not be buried in the family's mausoleum.

## Livia

This is Augustus' wife and true love. Though he steals her from her first husband, she is his only love. They only have Julia together, though she has two other sons from her first marriage that Augustus adopts. She does all she can to please her husband and often brings him virgin women to make him happy.

## Vestal Virgins

Generally there are six Vestal Virgins at a time and they serve the goddess Vesta in a temple beside the Forum. They serve for thirty years and have to remain virgins. They are given many privileges and the Chief Vestal Virgin is a highly revered person. One of the Vestal Virgins, Rubria, is raped by Nero.



## Consuls

The supreme elected civil and military official of Rome, there are originally two consuls that hold office for a year each. Emperors accept the office in intervals and replacements during the year are frequent, to spread the honor around as much as possible.

## Praetor

A state official, the most important being the city praetor. There are usually twelve of them at one time, though Tiberius makes it so that only four would be in power at one time.

## Quaestor

The lowest state official position.

## Soothsayers

Fortune tellers that are turned to for information about the future. The Caesars usually turn to them for good or bad omens and tend to believe them.



## **Objects/Places**

### **Rome appears in non-fiction**

The heart and capital of the Roman empire where all the Caesars live while they rule.

### **Gaul appears in non-fiction**

The first region Julius Caesar subdues and governes before becoming consul.

### **Spain appears in non-fiction**

Part of the Roman empire subdued by Julius Caesar and led by the other Caesars.

### **Britain appears in non-fiction**

A province just outside the Roman Empire controlled by Rome for a period of time.

### **Germany appears in non-fiction**

A province of the Roman Empire used as a source of troops.

### **Egypt appears in non-fiction**

A province of the Roman Empire, its capital is Alexandria. This is where Pompey flees from Caesar, and Marc Antony flees from Augustus to be with Cleopatra.

### **Forum appears in non-fiction**

This was the chief public place where important political business was announced and discussed. It is surrounded by other important buildings and religious temples.

### **Caprae appears in non-fiction**

The island now known as Capri where some of the Caesars go to escape Rome.



## **Campania appears in non-fiction**

A region where some of the Caesars go to escape Rome. Claudius dies in his country home in Campania.

## **Omens appears in non-fiction**

Omens are signs interpreted by soothsayers, or even the general public, that most of Rome's leaders take into consideration. Some do not act unless the omens are good.



# Themes

## Inifidelity

In modern day politics, fidelity is considered a very important attribute. When members of the congress, senators, or even the president is caught in an adulterous act, or rumors surface about such acts, the people react in a very negative way. In Rome, during the lives of the twelve Caesars, things are quite different. Fidelity is a respectable thing, but it is not common or necessary. All of the Caesars are involved in homosexual, heterosexual, or even both types of extramarital relationships and it does not really seem to bother the people. Julius Caesar is a great womanizer, and has a homosexual relationship with a king, yet he is still very popular with the population and his soldiers. Tiberius has some unusual habits, unusual even for the people in Rome, but he is hated regardless. It simply is not as important for the emperors to be faithful. Even Tiberius' wife brings virgins to him to satisfy his sexual needs. It is doubtful that if he were faithful to his wives he would be less despised.

Taking a different approach, if the wives of the emperors are unfaithful, leaders divorce them, punish them, or even kill them. This is quite normal and does not stop the fact that most of the women cheat on their husbands. There is an obvious gender inequality that seems to have been somewhat evened out in modern times.

## Reputation

Very few of the Caesars die of natural causes. Most are murdered by their family members or close friends. It does seem that the more popular an emperor is and the more accepted his ascension to the throne, the better his reputation. If he remains good and fair to the people of Rome, then he is destined to rule longer and die a natural death. If a leader is not popular, his reign lasts a shorter amount of time than it might have. People plot against them, doing all they can to kill them. However some evil leaders last longer than they should because they terrify the people. When Gaius dies, people are so afraid to rejoice, thinking it a plot to get them to show their true hatred towards him, they pretend like nothing has happened.

However, initial reputation does not always matter, nor does it determine what kind of emperor a person will be. Some of the most popular emperors, like Claudius, are horrible leaders. Once they take power, their evil vices come out and they sabotage themselves. Though Suetonius does not say how Claudius dies for sure, it is probably the as a result of his relatives who all want to rush to the throne. The worse an emperor's reputation, the easier it is for his friends and relatives to get rid of him because the people are more accepting of switching leaders. This is not so if he is a good leader, however. If a reputable leader is killed, and the people suspect it is the ascending leader, it is much harder for him to be liked, respected, and to stay in power.





## Circuses Enthrall the People

A great way to gain popularity is through circuses. The greater the show, the greater the reputation of the leader. It is the responsibility of the leaders to establish the shows and to direct the itinerary for each day. Julius Caesar is known for creating grand gladiatorial shows and Vespasian would even take requests from the audience and do his best to honor each one. This adds to their popularity and the people enjoy themselves. It is an even better thing if the Caesars enjoy themselves at the shows as well. If an emperor is visibly bored, it gives him a negative image, and the people are less inclined to honor him. However, if they are happy and cheer visibly then the people in turn pick up on these good vibes and they feel more at ease. Claudius is famous for standing up and cheering with the crowd, an act that humbles him and makes the people trust him.

Then there are the leaders, like Tiberius, who hate the shows. He makes everyone attend the shows and on especially hot days tortures the spectators by pulling the canopies open, making people stay in their seats in the scorching heat. Nero loves the shows but, as a cruel and unusual person, makes people stay in the shows to watch him perform his singing or lyre playing. It is said that people who try to escape are punished, women give birth during shows, and some elders even die. Nero even rigs the shows by bribing judges to keep from losing since he is not the best singer and fears the humiliation of defeat. These actions obviously do not bring him any honor and he is eventually killed and dethroned. Whether it is for honor, popularity, or to show power, the shows are big part of the Roman culture and even emperors have to take part in them. Whether they want to put the work into their production is their choice, but one fraught with consequences.



# Style

## Perspective

The book is written completely by Suetonius and is written in a subjective tone. Though he never says where he gets his information from, usually he just refers to stories handed down from generation to generation, and quotes his father once or twice. He writes in such a way that the reader trusts him and does not suspect he is making all of the stories up. His audience seems to be the general public, and that he is hoping to educate them about the men behind the legends and he does a decent job at this. The reader is constantly surprised by the content of the paragraphs and Suetonius really focuses on the different leaders' personal lives more than their professional lives, which is what the book intends.

## Tone

Suetonius gathers information from sources and stories he has heard throughout his life. Some of the facts even come from his father who served in the army under one of the emperors. He grabs the reader's attention with his smooth writing. He does tend to switch from topic to topic rather abruptly. He is very subjective throughout the book and does not show any real favoritism towards any of the emperors, pointing out both their good and bad attributes equally, where possible. The reader never feels him pass judgment. His writing is based solely on the facts he has at the time. He discusses everyone's personal lives and vices and this book almost reads like a gossip magazine or tabloid which is very entertaining.

## Structure

The book is divided into twelve chapters. Each chapter is about a different Caesar. Though this is a good way to organize the book, the chapters themselves are a bit unorganized. Suetonius jumps around a lot and does not discuss the different Caesars' lives in chronological order. Instead he starts with family lines too complicated to fully understand and then goes into political and military careers. This book is written in a time where most people do know all of the Roman names, but most of them are lost as minor characters in today's culture. He mixes the Caesars' personal lives, including marriages, scandals, and vices, into the middle of his tale. It appears he becomes tired or perhaps lazy towards the end of the book because instead of writing out the physical characteristics of the leaders, he makes bullet points. However, the bullet points are probably a better idea than how he initially starts out because it summarizes details unimportant to the goal of his book. He does not use many smooth transitions and instead numbers the different themes in each chapter. This causes a hard shift in topic, but it is not particularly distracting. It serves more to pull the reader along because they want to know more of what happens in the emperors' lives.



## Quotes

"I CAME, I SAW, I CONQUERED," Chapter 1, pg. 19.

"One of those completely unquestioning, devoted drudges on whom, more even than on the Thought Police, the stability of the Party depended," Chapter 2, pg. 23

"My dear Tiberius, you must not give way to youthful emotion, or take it to heart if anyone speaks ill of me; let us be satisfied if we can make people stop short at unkind words," Chapter 2, pg. 76.

"Fathers of the Senate, I have at last achieved my highest ambition. What more can I ask of the immortal gods than that they may permit me to enjoy your approval until my dying day" Chapter 2 pg. 80

"He is not thirsty for neat wine as he was thirsty men, But warms him up a tastier cup - The blood of murdered men," Chapter 3, pg. 139.

"Never was there a better slave, or a worse master," Chapter 4, pg. 155.

"Let them hate me, so long as the fear me," Chapter 4, pg. 167.

"Alcmaeon, Orestes, and Nero are brothers, Why? Because all of them murdered their mothers," Chapter 6, pg. 237.

"Otho in exile? Yes and no; That is we do not call it so. And may we ask the reason why? They charged him with adultery. But could they prove it? No and Yes; It was his wife he dared caress," Chapter 8, pg. 264.

"Decreed by all astrologers in blessing on our State; Vittelius will be no more on the appointed date," Chapter 9, pg 278.

"There was a raven, strange to tell, Perched upon Jove's own gable , whence he tried to tell us 'All is well!'—But had to use the future tense," Chapter 12, pg. 318 .

"You may tear up my roots, goat, But what good will that do? I shall still have some wine left for sacrificing you," Chapter 12, pg. 313.

"The Empire would be richer and happier when he had gone; and soon the wisdom and restraint of his successors proved him right," Chapter 12, pg. 319.

## Topics for Discussion

Why was the desire so high for people to enter politics during this era, especially since once in power, the politicians lives were always in danger?

All the Caesars had some sort of vice they tried to hide. Was it power that fed their vice, or the vices that got them into power?

Many Caesars did great public service and executed big projects, including temples and aqueducts, while others did nothing. Did civil engineering play a part in popularity or was it better to just do without and save money?

Wives were more than just for bearing children. If a leader had a scandalous wife he usually had to divorce her. Why was this so necessary, especially with other scandalous behaviour going on in their personal lives?

Julius Caesar was one of the only emperors that used connections to get ahead. This came back to haunt him as members of the Senate killed him. The other emperors did not bother making friends with the Senate, and they were also killed. Was there any successful strategy for doing the job and having the Senate in a leader's favor?

Even though the Caesars had sons, many of them adopted their grandsons to succeed them. Why was there such a high rate of this and what was the need if they already had sons?

Julius Caesar was the best general the Roman Army had ever had. Why would the senate want to get rid of him so badly, especially after he was deemed such a great leader?

Why did the public want Claudius to rule? Did they think that because he was not a typical politician that he would be more lenient towards them? What caused him to be so cruel in the end?