

## Act Five

### Standards Focus: Tragedy and the Tragic Hero

Over 2,300 years ago, the Greek philosopher Aristotle wrote his definition of a **tragedy**. According to Aristotle: “Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions.” In other words, to be a true tragedy, a play must make the audience pity the characters and make them fear the same consequences the character (usually the protagonist) experiences.

Similarly, Aristotle defined the concept of a tragic hero. A **tragic hero** is a protagonist with a tragic flaw (also called **hamartia**), which eventually leads to his downfall. The Aristotelian tragic hero is introduced as happy, powerful, and privileged, and ends up dying or suffering immensely because of his own actions or mistakes. The tragic hero must have four characteristics: goodness (a moral and ethical person), superiority (such as someone with supreme or noble authority or control), a tragic flaw (will eventually lead to his own demise), and the eventual realization that his decisions or actions have caused his own downfall (faces death or suffering with honor).

There is much debate about who is the actual protagonist of the play Julius Caesar. Some say the protagonist is Julius Caesar himself and that Brutus and Cassius are the antagonists; others say that Brutus is the protagonist and Antony is the antagonist.

*Directions: Compare and contrast the characters of Julius Caesar, Brutus, and Antony in the chart below. For each box, write a very brief answer to each of the questions in the first column. A few examples have been completed for you. As you complete the chart, pay attention to the characteristics you feel make a protagonist and antagonist. When you have completed the chart, answer the questions on the next page.*

<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Julius Caesar</b>	<b>Brutus</b>	<b>Antony</b>
<i>Is he happy with his life?</i>			
<i>How might he be considered a privileged person?</i>			
<i>Is he considered a moral and ethical person?</i>			
<i>Is he in a position of authority or control?</i>	<i>yes; he is the top ruler of Rome</i>		
<i>What is his tragic flaw?</i>			
<i>Does he end up dying or suffering immensely?</i>			<i>no</i>
<i>Is his death a result of his hamartia?</i>	<i>yes; his extreme pride, ego, and false sense of immortality lead to his murder</i>		
<i>Does he die realizing his death was his own fault?</i>			
<i>Does he face his death with honor?</i>		<i>no; he commits suicide with his own sword</i>	<i>n/a</i>
<i>If he is the protagonist, who is his antagonist?</i>			
<i>If he is the antagonist, who is his protagonist?</i>			