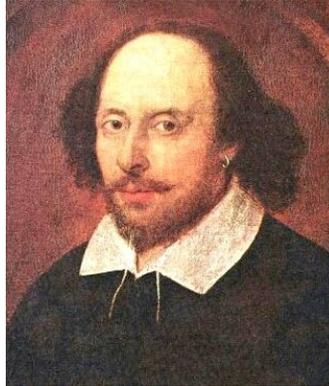


CORIOLANUS

by William Shakespeare



THE AUTHOR

William Shakespeare (1564-1616) was born into the family of a prosperous tradesman in Stratford-upon-Avon, England. While in his mid-teens, he was forced to leave school because his family fell into a period of poverty, so that he had only a rudimentary education. In 1582, he married Anne Hathaway, eight years his senior and already three months pregnant. The marriage produced three children in three years, but in 1585, Shakespeare left Stratford to go to London to seek his fortune in the big city.

In London, he embarked upon a career on the stage, becoming a popular actor by the early fifteen nineties. Around 1590, he penned his first plays; *Love's Labour's Lost* and *A Comedy of Errors* are both candidates for his initial effort. His early plays were comedies and show nothing of the depth that characterized his later works. His plots were borrowed from a variety of sources, both ancient and contemporary. During his career, he wrote 37 plays, three narrative poems, and 154 sonnets.

His writing brought him fame and popularity, but he continued to act as well as write (critics love to speculate about which of the characters in his plays would have been played by the author). He eventually became a shareholder in the Lord Chamberlain's Men (later the King's Men when James I ascended the throne). Most of his plays were performed at local theaters like the Rose, the Globe, and the indoor Blackfriars. When the Globe burned to the ground in 1613 (a cannon misfired during a performance of *Henry VIII*), Shakespeare retired, and died in Stratford three years later on his fifty-second birthday.

Coriolanus (1608) was in all probability the last of Shakespeare's tragedies and the last of his three Roman plays (after *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*). All three enabled him to deal with political issues from a safe distance that could not comfortably be covered in the context of his many plays about the English monarchy. The protagonist of the play was a general in the early years of the Roman Republic who won a great victory at Corioli in 493 B.C., long before the struggles marking the beginning of the Empire in the first century B.C. Shakespeare's main source for the story was Plutarch's *Lives*, to which he adheres closely.

Many critics today consider *Coriolanus* to be the most relevant of Shakespeare's political plays. Over the years, it has been staged by many seeking to use it to advance their own political agendas, from Communists in France in 1934 to Nazis under Hitler, who saw it as promoting Fascism. Today, given the experience of President Donald Trump, a man with a dangerously quick Twitter finger, one who lacks political experience, who has become the target of seasoned politicians who know how to manipulate the media and through them the crowds for their own self-aggrandizement, and who all too often brings trouble down on his own head by his unreasoning folly, the relevance of the play is easy to see.

MAJOR CHARACTERS

- Caius Marcius Coriolanus - The Roman general who serves as the play's protagonist, he earns his title because of his almost singlehanded defeat of the Volscian city of Corioli. Later he is driven from Rome by jealous tribunes, joins forces with the Volscians, then refuses to attack Rome, for which the Volscian general Aufidius arranges for his murder.
- Titus Lartius and Cominius - Roman generals in the war against the Volscians, they are supporters of Coriolanus.
- Menenius Agrippa - The best friend of Coriolanus, he tries to moderate the speech and behavior of his friend, usually without success.
- Sicinius Velutus and Junius Brutus - Roman tribunes who seek to destroy Coriolanus in order to enhance their own power. Note that the real Junius Brutus was an ancestor of the Brutus who helped assassinate Julius Caesar hundreds of years later.
- Tullus Aufidius - A Volscian general who has often been defeated by Coriolanus, he eventually arranges for his murder out of jealousy of his foe's popularity and because Coriolanus made peace with Rome rather than attacking the city.
- Volumnia - The mother of Coriolanus, she is a strong woman who is the only one who succeeds in talking him out of sacking Rome.
- Virgilia - The wife of Coriolanus.

NOTABLE QUOTATIONS

"The present wars devour him. He is grown
Too proud to be so valiant." (Junius Brutus, Ii, 253-254)

"Pray now, no more. My mother,
Who has a charter to extol her blood,
When she does praise me grieves me. I have done
As you have done - that's what I can; induced
As you have been - that's for my country.
He that has but effected his good will

Hath overta'en mine act." (Marcius [Coriolanus], Iix, 13-19)

"Faith, there have been many great men that have flattered the people, who ne'er loved them; and there be many that they have loved, they know not wherefore; so that, if they love they know not why, they hate upon no better a ground. Therefore, for Coriolanus neither to care whether they love or hate him manifests the true knowledge he has in their disposition, and out of his noble carelessness lets them plainly see't." (Second Officer, Iiii, 7-15)

"I had rather have my wounds to heal again
Than hear say how I got them." (Coriolanus, Iiii, 67-68)

"Better it is to die, better to starve,
Than crave the hire which first we do deserve." (Coriolanus, Iiii, 108-109)

"His nature is too noble for the world.
He would not flatter Neptune for his trident,
Or Jove for's power to thunder. His heart's his mouth.
What his breast forges, that his tongue must vent;
And, being angry, does forget that ever
He heard the name of death." (Menenius, IIIi, 255-260)

"Why did you wish me milder? Would you have me
False to my nature? Rather say I play
The man I am." (Coriolanus, IIIii, 14-16)

"You common cry of curs, whose breath I hate
As reek o' th' rotten fens, whose loves I prize
As the dead carcasses of unburied men
That do corrupt my air, I banish you!" (Coriolanus, IIIiii, 121-124)

NOTES

Act I, scene 1 - The play opens with a mob of angry, starving plebeians in Rome preparing for armed rebellion. The target of their wrath is Coriolanus, a patrician general who has won great victories for Rome but to them is a symbol of patrician greed. They are interrupted in their wrath by Menenius, who tries to calm them down by reminding them that the patricians care for them, but even they can do nothing to mitigate a famine caused by the gods. The leaders of the mob are unconvinced, arguing that the patricians pass laws to benefit themselves to the disadvantage of the poor. Menenius then tells a parable in which the parts of the body rebel against the belly, accusing it of taking all the food while engaging in no useful work. The belly replies that all the parts of the body receive their nourishment from him, while he is left with mere bran. Similarly, the Senate provides the people with all of their nourishment despite their complaints to the contrary.

At this point Caius Marcius, later to earn the title of Coriolanus, arrives and immediately begins excoriating the mob for their weakness, cowardice, vacillation, and desire to destroy everything that is worthy of respect and admiration. He asks Menenius what all the commotion is about, and is told that the people want the grain that they are convinced is being hoarded by the

Senate. Marcius tells him that another mob on the other side of the city has won the right to be represented by five tribunes of their own choosing. A messenger interrupts the general's rant to tell him that the Volscians have taken up arms against Rome. They are led by Tullus Aufidius, a noble general whom Marcius much admires, considering him a worthy opponent. Senators arrive and make plans to meet the Volscians in battle, calling on Marcius to join them. When they try to tell the mob to disperse, Marcius invites them to come along because the Volscians have plenty of grain that will soon be available to them. Two of the tribunes complain of Marcius' pride, but are convinced that he will win glory in the coming battle, cynically arguing that because he serves in a subordinate position, any failure will be laid at the feet of his commander while any success will be ascribed to his valor.

Act I, scene 2 - The second scene takes place in Corioli, where Aufidius warns the Senators of the city that the Romans have learned of their plans. He had hoped to capture as many Roman towns as possible before the Romans were aware of his intentions, but now they will be prepared for his attack. The Senators assure Aufidius that they can protect their own city and send him out to meet the Roman forces. He swears that if he and Marcius should meet on the field of battle, only one will leave alive.

Act I, scene 3 - Back in Rome, Marcius' mother Volumnia and his wife Virgilia discuss the coming war as they sew. Virgilia is worried about her husband, but Volumnia assures her that he is better off on the battlefield than in her bed. When he was still a mere lad, his mother sent him off to battle, where he won honors, making her proud of her son's valor. Virgilia prays for his safety, but Volumnia is certain that he will come home covered with the blood of his enemy after having tread on the neck of Aufidius. Virgilia's friend Valeria then enters and asks about her son, who clearly is a chip off the old block. He hates school, loves war games, and just a few days ago chased a butterfly until he caught it and tore it to pieces with his teeth. Valeria asks Virgilia to go out with her, but the latter insists that she will remain indoors until her husband returns. Valeria then tells her that Titus Lartius, one of the Roman generals, and Marcius are before the gates of Corioli and that victory appears certain.

Act I, scene 4 - Marcius and Titus Lartius are before the gates of Corioli and have heard that the Volscians and Romans are already engaged in the countryside. They prepare to attack the city, but the men of the city come out to meet them in battle, driving the Romans back to their trenches. Marcius, however, rallies the troops and leads them toward the city. When they arrive at the gates, Marcius enters, only to have the gates shut behind him. His troops give him up for dead, but soon he emerges, wounded and bleeding, fighting the enemy on every side.

Act I, scene 5 - Having secured victory in Corioli, the Roman troops begin to loot the town, bringing armfuls of spoils out of the city gates. Marcius, however, knows that the other Roman general, Cominius, has his hands full in his fight against Aufidius, and goes to help him despite his weakened condition.

Act I, scene 6 - Cominius enters with his soldiers in retreat from the onslaught of Aufidius. A messenger tells Cominius of the retreat of the Romans outside of Corioli, but soon a blood-stained Marcius arrives to announce their victory. When he finds that Cominius and his men have retreated

from Aufidius, he begs to lead a band of volunteers against the Volscian commander. Every man under Cominius volunteers, but Marcius selects only a few to follow him into battle.

Act I, scene 7 - Titus Lartius leaves some of his men to secure the town of Corioli while he leads the rest to join the battle against Aufidius.

Act I, scene 8 - Marcius and Aufidius meet on the field of battle and determine to fight one another to the death, but soon other Volscians come to the aid of Aufidius. Marcius drives them off, leaving the result of the conflict undecided.

Act I, scene 9 - Cominius enters on one side, Marcius on the other with his arm in a sling. The former hails the latter's heroism and valor, but Marcius shuns any praise, claiming that he merely did his duty. Cominius rejects his modesty and insists on rewarding him with a tenth of the spoils, which he refuses, much to the delight of his soldiers. Cominius gives him his horse and bestows on him the title Coriolanus in recognition of his part in the victory. Marcius asks only one favor - the freedom of the man in the city of Corioli who aided him when he was wounded.

Act I, scene 10 - Aufidius, frustrated that he for the fifth time was unable to defeat Marcius, determines to destroy him next time they meet by whatever means necessary, fair or foul.

Act II, scene 1 - Menenius is speaking to two tribunes, asking them why they so strongly oppose Marcius. According to them, both they and the plebeians they represent dislike him because of his pride and boastfulness. He responds that, unlike Marcius, they are proud without any corresponding accomplishments, and goes on to mock their follies. The tribunes step aside as Volumnia, Virgilia, and Valeria enter to tell Menenius that Marcius is on the way home after completing his triumph. He then shares the news with the tribunes. Soon the generals enter, accompanied by Marcius, henceforth known as Coriolanus. He is welcomed by all, though he tries to silence their cheers, and the crowd moves on to the Capitol. The two tribunes, however, lag behind and share their fear that Coriolanus will be made a consul. If he achieves such high office, he will surely undermine their power, but they also understand that, because he would refuse to court favor with the people, they would soon turn against him. Because he will not stoop to appear before the people, the tribunes should have no trouble spreading rumors about his hatred for the masses. Soon a messenger appears to bring them to the Capitol, where Coriolanus is to be honored for his exploits.

Act II, scene 2 - At the Capitol, two officers talk about the fickleness of the mob and remark that Coriolanus knows them for what they are and refuses to flatter them. Unfortunately, he is very vocal about the extent to which he scorns them, which is unlikely to help his political prospects. In fact, he is no politician, and is likely to rise to high office because of his deeds rather than his words. Cominius then addresses the crowd, speaking of the great military achievements of Coriolanus and praising his valor and heroism, though for his part, the hero of the hour slips away rather than hear his deeds praised before the multitude. When the address is over, the Senate sends for Coriolanus to formally appoint him to the office of consul. Custom demands that he then address the crowd, which he begs to forego. In his refusal the tribunes see their opportunity.

Act II, scene 3 - The scene begins with citizens discussing their response to Coriolanus being put forward for the office of consul; their conversation is largely comic relief. Meanwhile, Menenius

is still trying to convince Coriolanus to address the crowd, but he has no desire to boast of his military accomplishments or display his wounds in order to court their favor. The citizens approach him in small groups and he tries to play the role expected of him, but does it badly. He nonetheless receives the approval of the people, but then is informed that he must appear before the Senate. When he leaves to change his clothes, Brutus and Sicinius, the two tribunes, manipulate the crowd and turn them against him, convincing them to rescind their approval. The mob then heads for the Capitol in an angry mood.

Act III, scene 1 - The Roman generals inform Coriolanus that Aufidius has raised a new army of Volscians against them. At that point the two tribunes arrive and warn Coriolanus not to go out among the people, who are incensed against him. He recognizes that the tribunes are responsible for inciting the crowd and is determined to go out and tell the mob what he really thinks of them. In particular, he opposed the decision of the Senate to give free corn to the plebeians even after they had run away during the battle. He continues to speak against popular rule, and finally the tribunes accuse him of treason. They call on the aediles (police) to arrest him and cast him to his death off the Tarpeian Rock. When they attempt to do so, Coriolanus draws his sword and drives off the mob, after which his friends convince him to go home. Menenius tries to defend him, but by this time the crowd, egged on by the tribunes, will hear of nothing but Coriolanus' immediate death. He finally calms them down and offers to bring Coriolanus to the marketplace to face proper legal procedures.

Act III, scene 2 - Coriolanus, now in his home, refuses to kowtow to the mob no matter what the consequences. His mother scolds him for showing his true colors before he was firmly in power. He scorns her counsel, but Menenius begs him to go to the tribunes and apologize for the good of the state. Volumnia argues that, if pretense in war in order to gain victory over one's enemies is noble, why should it be less so in order to gain peace at home? His friends are sure the crowd will give him their love if he only yields a little in their favor. He reluctantly agrees, but Cominius warns him that the tribunes have prepared even more serious accusations against him.

Act III, scene 3 - In the marketplace, the two tribunes discuss the charges they intend to bring against Coriolanus, accusing him of seeking tyrannical power and of refusing to distribute to the people the spoils of war they deserved. They have gathered a mob seeded with partisans who have been coached to cry out whatever the tribunes desire. Their strategy is to make Coriolanus lose his temper, knowing that he will then speak what is really on his mind. As Coriolanus approaches the waiting crowd, Menenius reminds him to control his tongue, but as soon as the tribunes lodge false charges against him, he cries out against the people and their representatives, after which the crowd demands his destruction. The tribunes, portraying themselves as merciful, banish him from Rome and threaten death should he ever show his face in the city again. Coriolanus says that he banishes them instead by leaving their accursed city and turns his back on his enemies.

Act IV, scene 1 - At the gates of Rome, Coriolanus bids farewell to his family and friends. He tells them to take courage and assures them that he will be missed and recalled before long. Cominius offers to accompany him on his journey so his friends know where he is in case they need to contact him, but Coriolanus refuses and promises to keep in touch.

Act IV, scene 2 - As they return to their homes, Menenius, Volumnia, and the others encounter the two tribunes. Menenius tells Volumnia to ignore them, but she rains down curses on their heads

instead and accuses them of banishing a man who struck more blows for Rome than they have spoken words. She wishes they could face him in the desert and see what the outcome would be. The tribunes respond that they are sorry that Coriolanus brought about his own destruction, but she recognizes their hypocrisy and insists that they had been the cause of his downfall. They exit, and Volumnia is determined to repeat her curses and feed her wrath despite the attempts of Menenius to calm her down.

Act IV, scene 3 - Two soldiers meet, one Roman and one Volscian. The Roman soldier tells the Volscian that Rome is in turmoil; the people have rebelled against the nobility and the Senate, who are on the verge of removing the tribunes from office because of their dastardly treatment of Coriolanus. The Volscians, knowing of this upheaval, are preparing to attack when Rome is weakened from within.

Act IV, scene 4 - Coriolanus, in disguise, enters the city of Antium seeking Aufidius. He intends to offer his services to his erstwhile enemy.

Act IV, scene 5 - When Coriolanus arrives at the home where Aufidius is hosting a banquet, the servants try to prevent him from entering, but he insists, bantering with them in the process. Soon Aufidius comes out to find the cause of the commotion. Aufidius doesn't recognize him, but finally Coriolanus reveals his identity. He offers to fight for the Volscians against Rome, but tells Aufidius that, if he refuses his services, he is welcome to cut his throat on the spot. Aufidius joyfully receives him as a brother who was formally his bitterest enemy and asks him to help formulate their strategy against ungrateful Rome. The scene ends with further banter among the servants, who agree that war is much better than peace.

Act IV, scene 6 - Back in Rome, Brutus and Sicinius, the tribunes, gloat about the peace enjoyed by the city since the banishment of Coriolanus; the chaos predicted by him and his friends does not appear to be occurring. When Menenius enters, they ask if he has heard anything from Coriolanus, but neither he nor the man's family have heard a word. Soon a messenger brings news that the Volscians are taking up arms and preparing to invade, but the tribunes refuse to believe it. Two more messengers enter, one bearing the news that Coriolanus fights for the Volscians and the second insisting that the Volscian army is rapidly overrunning Roman territory. Cominius confirms the rumors, and he and Menenius blame the folly of the tribunes for bringing Rome to this dreadful state of affairs. Worse yet, many in the outlying territories are joining the Volscians rather than attempting to fight against Coriolanus. Their only hope seems to be to beg the mighty general for mercy, but who has sufficient standing to offer such a plea? Would he listen to the people, the tribunes, or even his friends in the Senate? Hearing the news, the people repent of their rashness in banishing Coriolanus. Meanwhile, the tribunes go to the Capitol to meet the invading forces.

Act IV, scene 7 - In the Volscian camp outside Rome, officers under Aufidius bemoan the fact that Coriolanus is gathering a larger following than their beloved leader and has in practice become the supreme commander of the invading forces. Aufidius expects that Coriolanus will be able to take Rome without a fight, but then he expects to bring him down once and for all.

Act V, scene 1 - Cominius has met with Coriolanus to try to convince him to have mercy on the city, but the general has refused all pleas and intends to burn Rome to the ground. Menenius has no

desire to engage in what he considers a fool's errand, but finally agrees to try, but only after Coriolanus has eaten and is likely to be in a better mood. Cominius is convinced that only Volumnia and Virgilia have any hope of softening his desire for vengeance.

Act V, scene 2 - Menenius goes to the camp of Coriolanus, but is denied entrance by the guards. Finally the general emerges from his tent, but refuses to hear a word from his old friend. He sends him away with a letter just as Aufidius enters.

Act V, scene 3 - Coriolanus assures Aufidius that he is prepared to lay siege to Rome and has turned a deaf ear to the entreaties of Rome's representatives, including his dear friend Menenius. Now, however, his mother, wife, and young son, along with Valeria, arrive in his camp to offer their pleas, but he is determined not to yield. His mother speaks of her anguish in facing either the loss of her country or the loss of her son and reminds him that his victory would mean the deaths of his loved ones. She does not beg for the defeat of the Volscians, but rather than Coriolanus should be the means of making peace between the two nations. He finally gives in and turns to Aufidius, offering the peace his mother proposed. Aufidius consents, but inwardly plans to use the situation for his own advantage.

Act V, scene 4 - In Rome, Menenius assures Sicinius that Coriolanus will never listen to his mother's voice and blames the tribune for bringing this sorry state of affairs to pass. A messenger tells them that the plebeians have seized Brutus and are intending to kill him if peace is not obtained, then warns Sicinius to flee. Another messenger appears with the news that the ladies have prevailed and the Volscians have departed, leading to widespread rejoicing.

Act V, scene 5 - The ladies are welcomed with honors by the Senators and people.

Act V, scene 6 - Back in Corioli, Aufidius gathers the people together, intending to undermine the peace efforts of Coriolanus. He speaks with a group of conspirators who are to take part in the plot to kill Coriolanus for his failure to follow through in the war against Rome. When Coriolanus announces the results of the peace treaty and he benefits the Volscians have received from it, Aufidius declares him a traitor. He is shocked at the charge, but the conspirators stir up the crowd and finally murder him. The lords of the city disavow the actions of the conspirators and blame Aufidius for their actions. He is now sorry for what he has brought about and announces that Coriolanus is to be buried with full honors.

ESSAY QUESTIONS

Discuss the following in a five-paragraph essay:

1. *Coriolanus* is considered William Shakespeare's last tragedy. Does the title character qualify as a tragic hero? If not, why not? If so, what is his tragic flaw, that personality trait that brings about this noble man's destruction?

2. When the Roman tribunes seek the downfall of the title character in William Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*, they often cite his pride as their justification for doing so. Is this a legitimate concern? Does Coriolanus act the way he does because he is motivated by pride, or is he driven primarily by other factors? In what ways does he demonstrate genuine humility?
3. "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. It is better to be of a lowly spirit with the poor than to divide the spoil with the proud" (Proverbs 16:18-19). In what ways does William Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* illustrate the truth of these maxims from the pen of Solomon? Support your arguments with events and quotations from the play.
4. To what extent does William Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* glorify violence? Be sure that your analysis goes beyond the speeches and behavior of the title character and incorporates other main characters as well, including Coriolanus' mother Volumnia. Is there anyone in the play who does *not* seem to favor and enjoy violence?
5. To what extent does class warfare play a role in the downfall of the central character in William Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*? Would the victorious general's problems been avoided had Rome been one united people rather than antagonistic social classes? Why or why not? Support your arguments with specifics from the play.
6. In William Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*, the title character is put forward for the consulship as a reward for his victorious campaign against the Volscians, but is quickly rejected through the manipulations of his enemies. Would Coriolanus have made a good consul? Why or why not?
7. In William Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*, the title character is an inveterate truth-teller; whatever passes through his mind is certain to come out of his mouth. Furthermore, he refuses to ingratiate himself with the common people - a flaw his deceitful enemies use against him, ultimately leading to his downfall and demise. Compare and contrast Coriolanus with Dr. Stockmann in Henrik Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*. To what extent do the unwillingness of both men to tell people what they want to hear contribute to their destruction?
8. In both William Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* and *Macbeth*, the title characters, though they appear strong and violent before the people around them, are dominated by even stronger women - Coriolanus by his mother and Macbeth by his wife. To what extent do these domineering women bring about the downfalls of the protagonists in the two plays? In what ways would the two men have been better off had they not submitted to the influence of the ambitious women in their lives?
9. In Act II, scene 3 of William Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*, two tribunes turn the crowd against the title character after he has won their approval. The demagoguery in the scene is very similar to that in which Mark Antony engages in Act III, scene 2 of the same playwright's *Julius Caesar*. Compare and contrast the two encounters, considering the arguments advanced by the speakers, the subtlety with which the crowds are manipulated, and the ways in which the crowds respond.

10. In Act I, scene 1 of William Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*, Menenius calms the mob by telling them a story - the tale of the belly. Analyze this tale. What is Menenius trying to tell the crowd? Is his argument valid? Compare and contrast it to the concept of "trickle-down" economics for which many argue today.
11. In Act I, scene 1 of William Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*, Menenius tells the tale of the belly to calm the obstreperous mob on the verge of violence. In the process he characterizes the different parts of the body politic as parts of a human body. Compare and contrast this tale with a similar analogy made by the Apostle Paul in I Corinthians 12:12-31. Consider particularly the applications made by the two men as they speak to their respective audiences.
12. In the final scene of William Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*, Aufidius and the conspirators with whom he has plotted turn the crowd against Coriolanus. In what ways are their actions similar to those of the tribunes in Act III, scene 2 of the same play? As you answer the question, analyze the arguments used by the protagonist's enemies as well as the rhetorical techniques they employ. To what extent do the actions of Coriolanus himself contribute to the successes of his opponents in these two scenes?
13. In the final scene of William Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*, the central character is praised by the multitude, but soon his enemies have swayed the crowd so completely that they are calling for his blood. Compare and contrast this scene with the events in the Gospels leading up to the death of Jesus, where at the time of the Triumphal Entry He is lauded as the Messianic king and five days later, many of the same people are crying, "Crucify Him, crucify Him!" In your analysis consider the nature of the crowds in question and the ways in which the enemies of the central figure turn them against him.
14. In I Samuel 27 and 29, David, driven into exile by the leaders of his own people, joins forces with the Philistines and fights for them. When the opportunity for him to fight against Israel arises, however, he cannot bring himself to do it, which eventually leads the king of the Philistines to become suspicious of his loyalty. In William Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*, the central character undergoes similar experiences, first being driven out by the Roman tribunes, then joining the Volscians, and finally refusing to lead the Volscian army against Rome, which turns Aufidius, the Volscian general, against him. To what extent are these series of events parallel? In your analysis, consider the motives of all those involved as well as their actions.
15. To what extent may William Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* be viewed as a critique of democratic government? Be sure to go beyond the speeches of the title character and consider as well the behavior of the common people in shaping your answer.
16. William Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* tells us little about the protagonist's father, but his mother plays a major role in the story. To what extent is the mighty warrior a "chip off the old block"? Compare his character to that of his mother and discuss how the upbringing she gave him helped to shape his personality and his values.

17. In Act V, scene 3 of William Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*, Volumnia, the protagonist's mother, convinces him not to attack the city of Rome. Should he have listened to her? Why or why not? Support your arguments with specifics from the play.
18. At the end of Act IV, scene 5 of William Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*, the servants are extolling the virtues of war. One says that peace makes men hate each other because they need each other less than they do in war. Evaluate this argument, including examples of circumstances in which rulers have deliberately sought warfare in order to unify their people.
19. In William Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*, to what extent may Coriolanus and his best friend Menenius be considered foils? Discuss their character traits and the ways in which they interact with the people and the tribunes as you support your arguments.
20. In William Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*, to what extent may the two leading women in the play, Volumnia and Virgilia, be considered foils? Discuss their personality traits and the ways in which they interact with Coriolanus and other characters as you support your arguments.
21. In William Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*, was the title character justified in throwing in his lot with the Volscians and fighting for them against the outlying cities of the Roman Republic? Why or why not? Support your arguments with specifics from the play.
22. Analyze the role played by the various crowds, both in Rome and Corioli, in the plot of William Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*. Are they like a Greek chorus, commenting on the action of the play for the benefit of the audience, or do they serve more as a character, shaping the action by their responses?
23. In William Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*, the title character proves himself totally incapable of surviving in the world of politics. He cannot moderate his public personality to suit the audience, and the result is his rejection and eventual death. Do you consider the inability of Coriolanus to play the politician a strength or weakness in his character? Why? What does your conclusion say about the behavior of modern politicians?
24. Evaluate the character of Menenius in William Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*. Is the title character's best friend a good man, a clever politician, or a hypocrite? Support your conclusions with specifics from the play.
25. The Greek philosopher Socrates is known for saying, "Know thyself." In William Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*, to what extent is the protagonist a man who knows himself? In what ways does his lack of self-knowledge contribute to his eventual destruction?
26. In William Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*, would the title character have made a good ruler in your opinion? Why or why not? Support your arguments, not just with his words, but also with his actions.

27. In Act III, scene 1 of William Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*, Menenius describes the protagonist in these words:

“His nature is too noble for the world.
He would not flatter Neptune for his trident,
Or Jove for's power to thunder. His heart's his mouth.
What his breast forges, that his tongue must vent;
And, being angry, does forget that ever
He heard the name of death.”

Discuss the accuracy of Menenius' description. Be sure to consider different parts of the speech and support your analysis with incidents from the play.