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# The Civil War

**Julius Caesar** · *49-48 BC · W. A. McDevitte and W. S. Bohn, 1869*

Caesar's commentaries on the civil war against Pompey, in the McDevitte and Bohn English of 1869. The hosted file is now the Civil War only, Books I–III, with the volume's index; the Gallic War from the same Gutenberg volume is hosted separately as The Conquest of Gaul. It opens not at a river, but in the Senate, with a letter.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

## How should a student read a commander's own account of a war against his own republic, and what is present—and absent—in Caesar's beginning?

*"When Caesar's letter was delivered to the consuls, they were with great difficulty, and a hard struggle of the tribunes, prevailed on to suffer it to be read in the senate;"*

**Caesar** · Book I, chapter I

Caesar begins with a letter, the consuls, the tribunes, Lentulus, Scipio, and Pompey's intention not to abandon the republic. He does not, in this text, name the crossing of the Rubicon. Teach what he chose to write, and do not supply a famous sentence he did not write here. The commentaries are a primary source, clear and partisan.

KEY CHARACTERS

**Julius Caesar**
*The general and the writer, who opens with his letter to the consuls*

**Pompey**
*The rival whose intention, Scipio says, is not to abandon the republic if the senate will support him*

**Lucius Lentulus**
*The consul who promises not to fail the senate if they declare their sentiments boldly*

**Scipio**
*The speaker whose words, Caesar says, seemed to have fallen from the lips of Pompey himself*

**The tribunes**
*They struggle to have Caesar's letter read, and cannot have a question put upon it*

**Afranius, Petreius, and the lieutenants**
*Pompey's officers in the western campaigns of the first books*

A LETTER, AND A REPUBLIC IN THE BALANCE

> *"When Caesar's letter was delivered to the consuls, they were with great difficulty, and a hard struggle of the tribunes, prevailed on to suffer it to be read in the senate;"*
>
> Book I, chapter I

**Grades 11–12**
Read the full text free at classicslaunch.org.

01

### A Letter to the Consuls

BOOK I, CHAPTERS I–II

*The work opens in the Senate. Caesar's letter is read only with difficulty. Lentulus and Scipio speak as if for Pompey, and the state moves toward war.*

- The first sentence is exact: "When Caesar's letter was delivered to the consuls..."
- The tribunes cannot prevail that any question be put on the subject of the letter
- Lentulus promises not to fail the senate if they speak boldly; if they court Caesar, he will adopt a plan for himself
- Scipio says it is Pompey's intention not to abandon the republic if the senate will support him

> *"When Caesar's letter was delivered to the consuls, they were with great difficulty, and a hard struggle of the tribunes, prevailed on to suffer it to be read in the senate;"*
>
> Book I, chapter I

02

### Italy, and the Flight of Pompey

BOOK I, THE ITALIAN CAMPAIGN

*The war in Italy is told as a rapid march, the taking of towns, and Pompey's withdrawal. The famous river is not named in this opening.*

- Do not place "the die is cast" or a named crossing of the Rubicon on this map; those words are not how this commentary begins
- Caesar presents the Italian campaign as a defense of his dignity and of the tribunes
- Pompey leaves Italy; the war will be decided elsewhere
- Read the justifications as Caesar's case, not as settled judgment

03

### Spain, and the First Reckoning

BOOK I, LATER CHAPTERS, AND BOOK II

*The commentaries turn to Spain and to Massilia, and to the first major reckonings with Pompey's lieutenants.*

- The Spanish campaign against Afranius and Petreius belongs to this stretch
- Massilia (Marseilles) is besieged in the same war
- Book II carries the war in the western and African margins as Caesar tells them
- The hosted file is Books I–III of the Civil War, not the Alexandrian, African, or Spanish wars sometimes bound with it

04

### Greece, and Pharsalus

BOOK III

*The last book carries Caesar across the sea against Pompey, to the campaign in Greece and the victory at Pharsalus.*

- The civil war's decisive battle is told by the victor
- Pompey's flight and the close of this commentary follow that field
- Teach the cost of a war between Romans; this is not a foreign conquest only
- For older students (11–12); civil slaughter should be taught with gravity

05

### The Hosted Edition, Now Split

THE FILE ITSELF

*The site header is exact: this text gives the Civil War, Books I–III, with the volume's index; the Gallic War from the same volume is hosted separately.*

- Translator: W. A. McDevitte and W. S. Bohn, 1869, from PG #10657
- An earlier copy wrongly gave the whole combined volume under both this title and The Conquest of Gaul; the texts are now split
- Quote this file, not the Gallic opening "All Gaul is divided..."
- The index at the end is the volume's index, not a new ending to the commentaries

Civil War | Senate and Power | Loyalty and Rivalry | Primary Testimony | Justification and Motive | The Cost of Victory

## What to watch for as you read

GRADES 11–12

1. The opening is a letter in the Senate, not a named crossing of the Rubicon. Do not invent "the die is cast" here; Caesar does not begin that way in this text.
2. The first sentence is exact: "When Caesar's letter was delivered to the consuls, they were with great difficulty, and a hard struggle of the tribunes, prevailed on to suffer it to be read in the senate."
3. This file is now the Civil War, Books I–III, only. The Gallic War from the same McDevitte and Bohn volume is hosted as The Conquest of Gaul. An earlier copy gave the whole volume under both titles.
4. Read Caesar as a primary source writing about a war against his own people. The prose is clear and the case is his own.
5. For older students (11–12). Civil bloodshed should be taught with gravity, not as a prize-story of genius.

**Quotations** are verbatim from the W. A. McDevitte and W. S. Bohn, 1869, Project Gutenberg #10657, the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/the-civil-war/. Citations give book and chapter (or canto and line) so every line can be checked.