Richard III Curriculum Guide

The Shakespeare Theatre Company’s central mission to be the leading force in producing and preserving the highest quality classic theatre. In support of this mission, the Education Department challenges learners of all ages to explore the ideas, emotions and principles contained in classic texts and to discover the connection between classic theatre and our modern perceptions. We hope that this Curriculum Guide will prove useful to you while studying Richard III, preparing to attend our production and reflecting on the performance.

This curriculum guide provides information and activities to help students form a personal connection to the play before attending the production. We encourage you to photocopy these articles and activities and use them as supplemental material to the text.

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Richard III Plot Synopsis

After a long civil war England enjoys a period of peace under King Edward IV and the victorious Yorks. But the king's younger brother Richard, Duke of Gloucester, resents Edward IV's power and the happiness of those around him. Malicious, power-hungry and bitter about his physical deformity, Richard plots to seize the throne by removing any and all impediments between him and the crown.

Richard halts the procession accompanying the casket of the former-King Henry VI. Over Henry's coffin Lady Anne Neville, daughter-in-law of Henry IV and wife of Prince Edward (both of whom Richard has murdered), curses Richard. He manipulates her so successfully that she agrees to be his bride. Richard's next step is to cause the murder of his older brother George, Duke of Clarence—the next in line for the throne. By insinuating Clarence committed treason, Richard has his brother arrested (having already arranged for him to be murdered while imprisoned). Richard is now positioned to serve as regent to King Edward IV's son (also named Edward) the Prince of Wales until he comes of age. Ailing, Edward IV succumbs to illness and Richard sends the Prince of Wales and his younger brother to the Tower—to better "protect" them. He then moves against the court noblemen who are loyal to the Princes; Vaughan, Rivers, Hastings and Grey are imprisoned, and later executed. Richard also has the boys' maternal relatives—the powerful kinsmen of Edward IV's wife, Queen Elizabeth—arrested and executed.

With Queen Elizabeth and the princes now unprotected, Richard has his political allies, particularly Lord Buckingham, campaign to have Richard crowned king. After a clever planting of insinuations regarding the illegitimacy of Edward IV and his children, Richard ascends to the throne as Richard III. By this time, Richard has alienated even his own mother, who curses him as a bloody tyrant. Recognizing the need to bolster his claim to the crown, Richard sends a murderer to dispose of the princes. Buckingham, until now Richard's staunchest ally, angered at the murders of the two young boys and at Richard's false dealings with him, flees. When rumors begin to circulate about a challenger to the throne who is gathering forces in France, noblemen defect in droves to join him. The challenger is Henry Tudor, Earl of Richmond a descendant of the Lancaster family asserting his own right to the throne.

Richard has his wife Queen Anne murdered, so that he can pursue a marriage with young Elizabeth, daughter of former Queen Elizabeth and dead King Edward IV. Though Elizabeth is Richard's niece, the alliance would secure his claim to the throne. Queen Elizabeth manages to forestall Richard and secretly arranges an alliance with Richmond.

In one final ruthless act, Richard captures his former ally Buckingham, on his way to join with Tudor's armies and has him beheaded. Former allies have all turned against Richard to join forces with Richmond who has landed in England and is marching inland to claim the crown. On the eve of the battle, both men are visited in dreams by the ghosts of all those whom Richard has slaughtered returning to condemn Richard and to hearten Henry Tudor. Tudor's forces defeat Richard's army at the Battle of Bosworth Field. Henry Tudor slays Richard exclaiming, "the bloody dog is dead" (V.v.ii). Accepting the crown as Henry VII, he marries Elizabeth of York, thus uniting the white rose (the Yorkists) and the red rose (the Lancastrians). This is the founding of the Tudor line of kings and the end of the War of the Roses.
**Historical Context of Richard III**

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<tr>
<th>The Divine Right of Kings</th>
<th>The Rules of Succession</th>
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<td>The divine right of kings is the belief that royal authority to rule comes only from God. According to Divine Right, a monarch is subject to no earthly authority, deriving the right to rule directly from the will of God. Any attempt to remove a proper monarch would be seen as acting against God’s will—a mortal sin deserving divine punishment.</td>
<td>In 14th-century England, the rules of succession were very strict. Heirs to the throne were chosen according to royal bloodlines; only members of the royal bloodline or direct descendants of the king could become the next monarch. The order of inheritance was based on <strong>primogeniture</strong>—the right of the eldest son to inherit his parents’ estate. Primogeniture was the law of inheritance for both citizens and royalty. It included many provisions in case an eldest son did not exist or died prematurely. In primogeniture’s most basic form, when a king died, the crown passed to his eldest son. If his eldest son died before him and had no heir, the crown passed to the next oldest son of the king who died, and so on through the sons of the deceased king. If no male child was born to the monarch, the crown then passed to his eldest daughter. If the deceased monarch had no children, the crown would go to his oldest brother. If this brother died before the king, the crown passed to the king’s next oldest brother. The order of succession stretched far beyond siblings and children to guarantee an undisputed heir to the throne, even if the king’s entire immediate family died before him.</td>
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**Classroom Activity:**

**Divine Right of Kings Essay**

1. Read this passage.
2. Paraphrase it, meaning write it in your own words.
3. Write a 1—2 page essay explaining how this passage is related to the belief in the Divine Right of Kings.

"Not all the water in the rough rude sea Can wash the balm off from an anointed king. The breath of worldly men cannot depose The deputy elected by the Lord. For every man that Bolingbroke hath pressed To lift shrewd steel against our golden crown, God for His Richard hath in heavenly pay A glorious angel. Then, if angels fight, Weak men must fall, for heaven still guards the right.

**Classroom Activity:**

**Act I Close Reading Questions**

1. Read *Richard III* Act I, Scene 1
2. As a class, discuss all the character traits we learn about Richard in this scene and create a list on the board.
3. Why do you think Richard wants to turn his brothers, King Edward and George, Duke of Clarence against one another?
4. Why do you think he wants his brothers to die?
5. Why does the order in which they die matter to him?
6. Richard’s final line of the scene is: “When they are gone, then must I count my gains.” What do you think his gains will be?
The Wars of the Roses marked a dark period in England's history. The conflict centered around two opposing sides of the same Plantagenet family – the Houses of York and the House of Lancaster, both descendants of King Edward III – who fought for possession of the crown. Historians named the conflicts the “Wars of the Roses” because the House of Lancaster’s symbol was a red rose the House of York’s symbol was a white rose. At the end of the war, the victorious Tudor family created an emblem of a single rose with both red and white petals, symbolizing the union of the two houses and a new time of peace.

Shakespeare dramatizes the conflict in a series of eight plays, referred to as the history plays. They include Richard II, Henry IV Parts I and II, Henry V, Henry VI Parts I, II and III and Richard III. In Richard III, Shakespeare dramatizes the very end of the series of wars and the triumph of Henry Tudor.

How did the Wars of the Roses begin?

Although the first battle of the war was officially fought in 1455, the roots of the war can be traced to a question of succession in 1377, the year that Edward III died and young Richard II became king at the age of ten. Edward III outlived four of his seven sons including his eldest, who was also named Edward. Young Edward earned the nickname the “Black Prince” during his conquests in continental Europe, where he overpowered armies and won lands for England. According to Divine Right, the Black Prince should have succeeded Edward III. When his eldest son died suddenly, the grief-stricken Edward III fell ill and died shortly after. Even though Edward III still had surviving sons, the Black Prince had a son, Richard, who inherited the throne through primogeniture. Richard was just ten years old, and some noblemen claimed Richard was not ready to assume the throne; many supported one of his adult uncles—John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, or Edmund of Langley, Duke of York, the fourth and fifth sons of Edward III. King Edward III’s Privy Council (his advisory group of wealthy, powerful lords) decided that the boy should be crowned King Richard II and that his uncles should act as regents, or primary advisors. The Dukes of York and Lancaster accepted this decision and maintained their regent status well into Richard’s adulthood. In his thirties, King Richard II began ruling England on his own, but failed to appease frequently feuding English lords. Political squabbles and frequent battles created chaos and unrest; eventually even Richard II’s own Privy Council began to doubt his ability to rule. These negative opinions of the king led the descendents of Lancaster and York to consider usurping the crown.

The Duke of Lancaster’s eldest son, Henry Bolingbroke, claimed that he had more of a right to be king than Richard II as a descendent of the eldest surviving son of Edward III. In 1399, with the support of friends and noblemen angry with Richard’s rule, Bolingbroke demanded that Richard II renounce the throne and crowned himself King Henry IV. Finally, he threw Richard II into jail, where the former king died with no heirs. England was now under Lancastrian rule, but with a monarch many felt had violated Divine Right.

How long did the Lancaster family rule England?

Despite the controversy surrounding King Henry IV’s rise to power, he ruled for 14 years and his son succeeded him without dispute. King Henry V was a competent and powerful leader, and his wars to reclaim the French lands once held by Edward III made him popular with his subjects. Unfortunately, Henry V’s untimely death in 1422 again raised questions about succession when his infant son was crowned King Henry VI. Older relatives acted as regents until Henry VI came of age. During his reign, Henry VI lost all French lands gained by his father and struggled with mental illness. He was made even more unpopular by a poor attempt to make peace with France by marrying the French king’s daughter, Margaret of Anjou. Already viewed as a weak king, Henry VI suffered a mental breakdown in 1453, rendering him incapable of ruling the country. The powerful and popular Richard, Duke of York (grandson of the first Duke of York) was named Protector of the Realm and ruled in Henry’s stead. Clearly a stronger ruler, the Duke of York also felt he had a valid claim to the throne because of his direct descent from Edward III’s son. He began to assert his authority in minor clashes with powerful supporters of Henry VI. When Henry recovered in 1455 and took back control of the crown, Queen Margaret built up an alliance against Richard, Duke of York to attempt to diminish his influence.
When did the fighting start?

The first battle of the Wars of the Roses broke out in 1455 when the thwarted Richard, Duke of York raised a small army and marched on London, meeting Henry VI’s forces at St. Albans. Richard battled bitterly with the king’s army, commanded by Queen Margaret. The battle was a Yorkist victory, regaining some influence for Richard, and the Yorkists and Lancastrians compromised to maintain the peace for four years. However, disputes over who would be heir to the throne continued—Henry VI had a young son, but many powerful nobles believed Richard, Duke of York should be the successor. The dispute broke out into violence again in 1459, and Richard was killed in the Battle of Wakefield in 1460. Nevertheless, Richard’s eldest son, Edward of York, prevailed at the Battle of Towton and was crowned King Edward IV in 1461. Edward banished Margaret and her son to France, and imprisoned the former king Henry. The crown stayed with the Yorks until the wars’ end. King Edward IV fought some rebellions against his claim on the English throne, none of which were successful.

When do the events in Shakespeare’s play Richard III begin?

King Edward IV had controversially married the widowed commoner Elizabeth Woodville and, at her request, granted her large extended family titles and favors. The King’s younger brother Richard, Duke of Gloucester, and many other nobles resented this. In 1483, King Edward IV died from natural causes, and Richard was appointed regent for Edward IV’s 13-year-old son, against the wishes of the Queen’s relatives. With this position of power, Richard punished the Woodvilles by delaying Prince Edward’s coronation. Word broke out that Edward IV had married Elizabeth Woodville while betrothed to another woman, voiding their marriage and making their son illegitimate. Just crowned King Edward V, the English no longer considered the boy of royal blood. At the request of several nobles, including the Duke of Buckingham, Richard was crowned King Richard III.

Full of turmoil and unhappiness, Richard III’s two-year reign concluded the York’s hold on the throne. Henry Tudor, the Earl of Richmond, a noble distantly descended from the House of Lancaster, raised a rebellion and took the crown in 1485 after defeating Richard III at the Battle of Bosworth Field. Richmond solidified his claim to the throne by marrying young Elizabeth, King Edward IV’s daughter, and uniting the Houses of York and Lancaster.

So who won the war?

The Tudor family ended up holding the crown for five generations. Henry Tudor, Earl of Richmond was crowned King Henry VII and ruled from 1485-1509. His successors were Henry VIII (r.1509-1547), Edward VI (r.1547-1553), Mary I (r.1553-1558) and Elizabeth I (r.1558-1603), who ruled during Shakespeare’s time.
The War of the Roses Family Tree

King Edward III

Edward, The Black Prince

John of Gaunt
Duke of Lancaster

Edmund, Duke of York

Duchess of York

Thomas, Duke of Gloucester

Duchess of Gloucester

Queen Isabella

King Richard II

King Henry IV, Henry Bolingbroke, Duke of Hereford

Edward, Duke of Aumerle,

Richard, Earl of Cambridge

Owen Tudor, Katherine’s 2nd Husband

Queen Katherine, French Princess

King Henry V

Queen Margaret

King Edward IV

George, Duke of Clarence

King Richard III

Edmund Tudor, Earl of Richmond

Edward

Lady Anne

Elizabeth

Edward

Henry VIII

Anne Boleyn

Elizabeth I

Note: Bold Names in Gray are characters in Richard III
In Shakespeare’s time, many people believed that fate was determined not by a person’s actions and decisions, but by a number of outside forces, both natural and supernatural. The concept of free will was not widely accepted when Shakespeare wrote his plays; most Elizabethans believed in predetermination; the idea that God has pre-planned every event that will happen for all time. There was a delicate balance between Christian beliefs and pagan superstitions in the 16th century. Shakespeare’s characters often encounter a fate that is a result of the influence of external forces—the alignment of the planets, social status or even personal appearance. While the agents of Richard’s fate include curses and ghosts, which modern audiences might associate with witchcraft and black magic, Elizabethans may have seen these as instruments of heaven or a higher power, revenging wrongs committed by the House of York during the Wars of the Roses.

In 16th century public opinion, there was no separation between body and soul either; any defect in one affected the other. A proverb at the time referenced hair color as an indicator of one’s personality: “Red wise, brown trusty, pale envious, black lusty.” A physical deformity informed Elizabethans of one’s entire personality; deformity on the outside signified decay on the inside. A physical imperfection from birth indicated a permanent and major defect of the soul. Robert Cecil, Earl of Salisbury and a powerful politician during Queen Elizabeth’s reign, was born a hunchback. His “deformity” prompted public criticism and ridicule. Controversy surrounding his possible involvement in the Gunpowder Plot of 1605 led some of Cecil’s enemies to claim that his corruption was a result of his deformity.

Elizabethans would likely have thought the same of Shakespeare’s Richard III as they did of Robert Cecil. In the Elizabethan view, Richard’s deformity would have explained not only his moral corruption but also his ambitiousness and desire for revenge. In his essay Of Deformity, Francis Bacon writes: “Deformed persons are commonly even with nature; for as nature hath done ill by them, so do they by nature; being for the most part (as the Scripture saith) void of natural affection; and so they have their revenge of nature.” As Richard says himself in his opening speech, he is “determined to prove a villain” because his physical appearance does not match the celebratory, peaceful time of Edward’s victory. The motivation for his evil deeds throughout the play may have been obvious to Shakespeare’s audience: he wanted to exact revenge for his physical deformity. Richard’s deformity might also have been viewed as an act of divine retribution for wrongs perpetrated by Richard’s ancestors.

The historical King Richard III was not actually misshapen to the extent that actors and literature have portrayed him. He did have a curvature of the spine, causing his right shoulder to be higher than his left, but it was not the huge hump and withered arm he is often depicted with now. The rumors that spread of a much bigger deformity in the king began long before Shakespeare’s portrait. Shortly after Richard’s death, the Tudors began describing him as a monster. Their motive was to pin on Richard the deaths of the princes in the Tower, and they believed that an image of Richard as a horrifying, misshapen hunchback would make the crime seem much more plausible. Eventually the rumors were accepted as truth, and Richard gained the physical appearance and reputation that is reflected in Shakespeare’s play.
Another significant aspect of Shakespeare’s Richard III is the supernatural, appearing in the forms of prophecies, dreams and ghosts. Elizabethans believed strongly in what we now term “paranormal” phenomena; astrology, omens and spells were a part of daily life. People often consulted the alignment of the stars and planets before making important decisions. Villagers who practiced “witchcraft” or “wizardry”—wise women and men who can be thought of as Elizabethan holistic healers—were called upon to cure physical ailments with potions and tricks. Their use of “magic” was revered and feared; as often as witches were consulted, they also were blamed when something went wrong in villages. Witch-hunts were common in the 16th Century, and many innocent people were executed for witchcraft in Shakespeare’s time.

The character of Margaret in Richard III has some distinctive witch-like qualities. At the end of the play, the curses she pronounced in Act1, scene 3 are fulfilled. She is a self-proclaimed prophetess—eccentric, lonely and old. All of these qualities were associated with witches of the 16th century. Margaret is, however, lacking an important component of witchhood: alliance with the devil. She rather invokes God’s power in her curses: “I’ll not believe but they ascend the sky / And there awake God’s gentle-sleeping peace” (I.iii.287-88). Margaret’s curses are another instrument of divine retribution: she is seeking revenge for her own injuries, and through her a much larger justice is exacted. Elizabethans paid much attention to omens and signs, including those in dreams. Hastings disregards Stanley’s dream of a murderous boar (representing Richard) and dies as a result. The only characters that act as a result of supernatural warnings are Stanley and his nephew Richmond—two of the characters alive at the play’s end. Stanley is not the only character in Richard III who predicts the future through dreams; Clarence and Richard both have dreams that foreshadow their deaths. Clarence’s nightmare is full of warnings of Richard’s intent to murder him and hints at his own drowning. Although an Elizabethan audience would have immediately recognized the intervention of some supernatural power in his dream, Clarence is ignorant of its ramifications. Richard’s dream likewise forebodes his end. As a string of wronged ghosts curse Richard and encourage Richmond in Richard’s sleep the night before the battle, Shakespeare’s audience could easily have predicted the outcome of the conflict. Elizabethan ghosts were omnipotent—seeing far into the future—and they always appeared with a distinct purpose, usually involving righting a wrong done to them in life. Although these ghosts do not bring about Richard’s death and Richmond’s triumph, they foretell it, and, in discouraging and scaring Richard (and encouraging Richmond), help their cause. Like Margaret’s curses, these spirits have a divine, not demonic, quality; the ghost of Buckingham wishes that “God and good angels fight on Richmond’s side.”

By the end of the play, with an heir of the house of Lancaster on the throne, divine retribution would have been carried out in the eyes of the Elizabethans. Order is restored, and all have met their predetermined fate.

Shakespeare uses four different examples of the supernatural in his play Richard III. Write a 2–3 page essay explaining the what the four supernatural examples are and what purpose they serve in the play. Are they plot devices? Do they reveal character traits? Are they used to foreshadow events? Do they contribute thematically to the play? Which one do you think is most effective? How could you envision it being portrayed onstage?
Shakespeare wrote several works which dramatize significant events in English history. This type of play, called a "history play," was popular in Elizabethan England. Shakespeare intended for these plays to be good theatre—condensing and simplifying events, ignoring chronology and altering characters’ actions and ages to tell a compelling story. In Richard III, Shakespeare also intended to write a play to glorify the Tudor dynasty, as Queen Elizabeth’s grandfather was Henry Tudor, Earl of Richmond, the conqueror at the end of the play. By portraying Richard as a hunch-backed villain and Richmond as a valiant rescuer, Shakespeare validated Queen Elizabeth’s reign, and also created a fictionalized picture of history that has remained through the modern day. Looking back at Shakespeare’s historical sources, we can see how history has been written, revised and fictionalized throughout the ages.

Shakespeare’s main source for the historical events in Richard III was The Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland by Raphael Holinshed. Published in 1587, Holinshed’s Chronicles contained maps of England, Scotland and Ireland and the history of each region, recorded from prehistoric legends through the 16th century. Much of Holinshed’s information came from previous historians, including Polydore Vergil. When Henry Tudor was crowned King Henry VII in 1485, he commissioned Polydore Vergil to write a history of the English monarchy. The book, Anglica Historia, was meant to reaffirm Henry VII’s claim to the throne. It portrayed Henry Bolingbroke’s usurpation of Richard II’s crown as the source for warring and strife, and claimed that the restoration of peace resulted from Henry Tudor’s rise to power. The history perpetuated other rumors like Richard III’s physical deformity.

Shakespeare also found inspiration for the character of Richard III in Sir Thomas More’s book The History of King Richard the Thirde, published in 1543. Thomas More grew up in the household of John Morton, Bishop of Ely, who was imprisoned by Richard III during his reign. According to Moore, "Richard, the third son, of whom we now treat, was...little of stature, ill-featured of limbs, crook-backed, his left shoulder much higher than his right, hard-favoured of visage... He was malicious, wrathful, envious and from afore his birth ever froward." While More’s account is intended to be factual, he exaggerated details about Richard’s deformity, creating a monstrous picture of a murderer that Shakespeare then solidified into the delicious villain Richard is thought of today.

Shakespeare’s depiction of Richard was not only aesthetic, but also political. When the play Richard III debuted in the early 1590s, Queen Elizabeth was over 60 years old and had no children, and therefore no heir to the throne. History told Elizabethans that this could cause terrible civil wars, as rival lords made claims to the throne after the death of the monarch. Shakespeare, writing and performing under the favor of the Queen, created a play that kept public opinion in support of continuing the Tudor monarchy. Richard III also has a warning for anyone who considered taking the crown from the Tudors after Elizabeth’s death: usurpation is a dangerous, and ultimately deadly, business.

Shakespeare crafted his play and the character of Richard so well it is often mistakenly considered a factual portrayal of people and events. His account of history has led to continual debate around the “villainy” of Richard. Did he order the execution of his brother the Duke of Clarence? Was Richard directly responsible for the deaths of the princes in the Tower of London? How, if at all, was Richard physically deformed? Shakespeare made choices in his portrayal of Richard and the final years of the Wars of the Roses, penning a character audiences loved to hate. Through the creative manipulation of English history, Shakespeare created a “mirror” for Elizabethans to revisit their past and consider its current relevance.

**Research Project**

Research the real life of King Richard III. Write a 3-5 page paper comparing and contrasting the real King Richard III and Shakespeare’s fictional character. Explore both personal and public information, including life events, world events, personality, political endeavors, achievements, and his death. Differentiate what is fact and fiction in the play. Describe how history portrays Richard III compared to Shakespeare.
Ask your students to think about how they change their language in different situations: Do you speak differently and choose different words when you talk to your friends versus when talking to your parents or teachers? Would you speak differently at a job interview versus a family gathering? How and why does our language change in these situations?

William Shakespeare was writing scripts for specific actors in his own acting company when he created his plays. He purposely wrote lines in two different ways to communicate information about the characters to his actors. Additionally, he wanted characters to sound different from one another and to adapt their language to new situations, the way people do in real life. The two ways he writes are called **prose** and **verse**.

### VERSE

**Verse** is another word for poetry.

Verse has a rhythmic structure, like a song lyric.

We refer to the rhythm as the meter.

**Iambic Pentameter** is the name of the rhythm.

If a character’s lines are written in **VERSE** we assume the following information:

* The character is nobility or from the upper class and very wealthy
* The character is formally educated
* The character may be experiencing a strong emotion like love or jealousy and needs to use poetry

**How can I tell if it’s verse?** You can tell when lines are written in verse because every line begins with a capital letter and the lines are all different lengths on the page. This is because each line is written with a metrical structure. Here’s an example:

**RICHARD III:**
Now is the winter of our discontent
Made glorious summer by this son of York;
And all the clouds that lour’d upon our House
In the deep bosom of the ocean buried.
Grim-visag’d War hath smooth’d his wrinkled front:
And now, instead of mounting barbed steeds
To fright the souls of fearful adversaries,
He capers nimbly in a lady’s chamber,
To the lascivious pleasing of a lute.
But I, that am not shap’d for sportive tricks,
Nor made to court an amorous looking-glass;
Why, I, in this weak piping time of peace,
Have no delight to pass away the time,
Unless to spy my shadow in the sun,
And descant on mine own deformity.
And therefore, since I cannot prove a lover
To entertain these fair well-spoken days,
I am determined to prove a villain,
And hate the idle pleasures of these days.
Plots have I laid, inductions dangerous,
By drunken prophecies, libels, and dreams,
To set my brother Clarence and the King
In deadly hate, the one against the other.

### PROSE

The ordinary form of written or spoken language without metrical structure. Prose can be very descriptive, but it follows the rules of grammar. Essays, news articles and novels are examples of written prose.

If a character’s lines are written in **PROSE** we assume the following information:

* The character is most likely from the lower class and not very wealthy
* The character is most likely uneducated

**How can I tell if it’s prose?** You can tell when lines are written in prose because they look like a regular paragraph. Here’s an example:

**Second Murderer:** What, shall we stab him as he sleeps?
**First Murderer:** No; then he will say ‘twas done cowardly, when he wakes.
**Second Murderer:** When he wakes! why, fool, he shall never wake till the judgment-day.
**First Murderer:** Why, then he will say we stabbed him sleeping.
**Second Murderer:** The urging of that word ‘judgment’ hath bred a kind of remorse in me.
**First Murderer:** What, art thou afraid?
**Second Murderer:** Not to kill him, having a warrant for it; but to be damned for killing him, from which no warrant can defend us.
**First Murderer:** I thought thou hadst been resolute.
**Second Murderer:** So I am, to let him live.
**First Murderer:** Back to the Duke of Gloucester, tell him so.
**Second Murderer:** I pray thee, stay a while: I hope my holy humour will change; ‘twas wont to hold me but while one would tell twenty.
**First Murderer:** How dost thou feel thyself now?
**Second Murderer:** ‘Faith, some certain dregs of conscience are yet within me.
**First Murderer:** Remember our reward, when the deed is done.
**Second Murderer:** ‘Zounds, he dies: I had forgot the reward.
**First Murderer:** Where is thy conscience now?
**Second Murderer:** n the Duke of Gloucester’s purse.
Iambic pentameter is the main rhythmic structure of Shakespeare’s verse. One line of pentameter has 10 syllables, which we divide up into five units of meter called feet. Each foot of the verse contains two syllables.

A foot = 2 syllables
Pentameter = a line with 10 syllables which we divide into 5 feet

But soft! / What light / through yon / der win / dow breaks?

The word iambic refers to the rhythm of the line. When the first syllable is unstressed and the second syllable is stressed, as in the word Hello, it is called an iamb. Iambic means push, persistency or determination. The prefix penta means five, as in pentagon, a five sided shape. Therefore, iambic pentameter is one line of poetry consisting of five forward-moving feet.

Identifying the rhythm of a line is called scansion. Actors scan their lines to know how Shakespeare wanted the line to be said. We mark unstressed syllables with this symbol ~ and stressed syllables with a slash /. Like this:

But soft! What light through yonder window breaks?

Classroom Activities

When learning iambic pentameter, many students make the mistake of unstressing & stressing every other word instead of every other syllable. Here are some activities to help them.

1. Syllable Exploration: Have students say their names out loud and determine which syllable of their name is stressed. If they’re not sure, have them repeat their name stressing a different syllable each time.

2. Clap the rhythm of iambic pentameter: Have students say the rhythm out loud while tapping their fingers to their palm on the unstressed syllables (da) and clapping their palms together on the stressed syllables (DUM). Without specific words, the rhythm of iambic pentameter is: da DUM da DUM da DUM da DUM da DUM. Ask students what the rhythm sounds like to them. Typical answers are: the human heartbeat, a horse gallop, or the beat underneath a piece of music. Iambic pentameter drives and supports Shakespeare’s verse, moving the language along in a forward flow that imitates natural speech patterns. Once the class is speaking and clapping in unison and you feel they know the rhythm, try clapping the rhythm while speaking lines from the play.

3. Scansion: Actors scan the text to determine how they are supposed say the lines. The stressed words are ones the actor needs to emphasize when speaking the lines. Scanning also helps us figure out how to pronounce unfamiliar words and the names of characters. Identify iambic pentameter by scanning the following lines from Act I Scene 2.

Lady Anne: Avaunt, thou dreadful minister of hell.
Richard: Sweet saint, for charity, be not so curst.
Lady Anne: O, wonderful, when devils tell the truth!
Richard: I was provoked by her sland’rous tongue.
Lady Anne: Thous wast provoked by thy bloody mind,
Lady Anne: Ill rest betide the chamber where thou liest!
Richard: I’ll have her, but I will not keep her long.
Activating Shakespeare’s Language

Summary vs. Paraphrasing

Summarizing—Concisely stating what a passage in a text says. A summary is usually stated in third person. It’s useful to demonstrate a basic understanding of reading comprehension.

Paraphrasing—Restating each line in your own words. Paraphrasing should be done in first person. Paraphrasing is an important tool that actors use to understand what their lines mean how their character feels.

Here is an example of a summary and paraphrase of a passage from Richard III Act I Scene 1.

Richard: Go tread the path that thou shalt ne’er return.
Simple, plain Clarence, I do love thee so
That I will shortly send thy soul to heaven,
If heaven will take the present at our hands.

Summary
Richard is secretly saying good bye to his brother Clarence, who he plans to murder.

Paraphrase
Walk to your death Foolishly honest Clarence. I love you so much
That I’m going to send your soul to heaven soon,

Classroom Activity

Step 1: Select one of the speeches below and read it out loud for meaning.
Step 2: Look up unknown words.
Step 3: Paraphrase each line of text. (put it into your own words)
Step 4: Perform the speech out loud.

Richard:
Was ever woman in this humour woo’d?
Was ever woman in this humour won?
I’ll have her; but I will not keep her long.
What! I, that kill’d her husband and his father,
To take her in her heart’s extremest hate,
With curses in her mouth, tears in her eyes,
The bleeding witness of her hatred by;
Having God, her conscience, and these bars against me,
And I nothing to back my suit at all,
But the plain devil and dissembling looks,
And yet to win her, all the world to nothing!
Ha!
Hath she forgot already that brave prince,
Edward, her lord, whom I, some three months since,
Stabb’d in my angry mood at Tewksbury?
A sweeter and a lovelier gentleman,
Framed in the prodigality of nature,
Young, valiant, wise, and, no doubt, right royal,
The spacious world cannot again afford
And will she yet debase her eyes on me,
That cropp’d the golden prime of this sweet prince,
And made her widow to a woeful bed?
Upon my life, she finds, although I cannot,
Myself to be a marvellous proper man.

QUEEN MARGARET:
What were you snarling all before I came,
Ready to catch each other by the throat,
And turn you all your hatred now on me?
Did York’s dread curse prevail so much with heaven?
That Henry’s death, my lovely Edward’s death,
Their kingdom’s loss, my woeful banishment,
Could all but answer for that peevish brat?
Can curses pierce the clouds and enter heaven?
Why, then, give way, dull clouds, to my quick curses!
If not by war, by surfeit die your king,
As ours by murder, to make him a king!
Edward thy son, which now is Prince of Wales,
For Edward my son, which was Prince of Wales,
Die in his youth by like untimely violence!
Thyself a queen, for me that was a queen,
Outlive thy glory, like my wretched self!
Long mayst thou live to wail thy children’s loss;
And see another, as I see thee now,
Deck’d in thy rights, as thou art stall’d in mine!
Long die thy happy days before thy death;
And, after many lengthen’d hours of grief,
Die neither mother, wife, nor England’s queen!
Attending the Performance

Thoughts about the importance of being an audience member from Shakespeare Theatre Company Artistic Director Michael Kahn

“When you go to the theatre, you are engaging with other living, breathing human beings, having an immediate human response. In the theatre you sense that all of this may never happen again in this particular way.

As a member of the audience, you are actually part of how that’s developing—you have a hand in it … You are part of a community where you are asked to be compassionate, perhaps to laugh with or grieve as well as to understand people, lives and cultures different from your own.”

Theatre Etiquette

The phrase “theatre etiquette” refers to the behavior that is expected by audiences when attending a performance. It is important to remember that the actors on stage can see and hear you, just as you can see and hear them. Please be respectful to the actors and your fellow audience members by being attentive and observing these guidelines:

1) Turn off your cell phone and other electronic devices during the performance so the sound and light are not distracting to anyone.
2) Leave all food and drinks in your school’s bin. They will be set out in the lobby for you during intermission.
3) Honest reactions to what is happening onstage are encouraged! We hope you will laugh, gasp, applaud and enjoy the performance.
4) Please do not talk during the performance. Save discussions with friends for intermission and after the performance.

What To Expect

♦ The performance will begin at 10:00 a.m.
♦ The show is approximately 2.5 hours long.
♦ There will be a 15 minute intermission.
♦ Bring a snack or buy a snack for $2.00—please have cash.
♦ Leave backpacks at home or school.
♦ There will be a post show discussion with the cast.
♦ The theatre seats 800 people, so stay with your group.
♦ STC Education Staff will seat you, please follow their directions.
Resource List

Shakespeare Dictionaries

Books on Teaching Shakespeare

Books on William Shakespeare’s Life and Writing

Websites
- Shakespeare Theatre Company—http://www.shakespearetheatre.org/education
  ON SHAKESPEARE: Articles and information about Shakespeare’s life and world.
  Teacher Curriculum Guides: Plot synopsis, character maps, lesson plans and discussion questions.
- In Search of Shakespeare: Shakespeare in the Classroom—http://www.pbs.org/shakespeare/educators/
  The companion website to Michael Wood’s four-part PBS series *In Search of Shakespeare*, this site includes extensive research about Shakespeare’s life and works, as well as interactive features.
- Folger Shakespeare Library—http://www.folger.edu
  Includes excellent resources for further reading about Shakespeare, as well as fun games and information designed specifically for students and teachers.

Standards of Learning

Participation in our student matinee program and the lessons and activities found in this curriculum guide support grade 8-12 Common Core standards in English Language Arts and The National Core Arts Standards for responding and connecting to Theatre Art. Primary content areas addressed include but are not limited to:

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