

Classroom Connections

Before the performance...

Director's Chair

Imagine you are directing a production of *Richard III* and preparing for the first meeting of your production team, which includes the set, costume, lighting and sound designers. Consider the topics a director would want to address in this meeting by responding to these questions:

- Why do you want to direct this play?
- In what time-period will this production occur and why?
- What are you looking for in an actor to play the character of _____?
- What locations/atmospheres must the set create?
- What does this world look and sound like?

In small groups, ask students to share their responses and discuss the similarities and differences in their artistic visions for the play. Challenge the students to create a group vision for the play, incorporating ideas from all the “directors.”

Just a Dream

Elizabethans believed dreams contained omens and foretold future events. In *Richard III*, Clarence's dream foretells his murder at Richard's order. Read act 1, scene 4 aloud as a class and identify the imagery, symbolism, metaphors and foreshadowing present in Clarence's dream. Ask students to free-write about a memorable dream they've had. Then ask students to write a monologue telling the story of the dream, utilizing vivid imagery, symbolism, metaphors, coach students to refer to emotions they felt during the dream, their emotional state while retelling the dream and what the dream may say about what is happening in their lives. Collect all the monologues and make a dream notebook.

False Faces

Many characters in *Richard III* operate by seeming to be what they are not. This tactic is especially important in I.ii, when Richard convinces Anne to marry him, and III.vii, when Richard “agrees” to become King. Divide students into groups, assigning half the groups one scene and half the groups the other. Ask each group to go through their scene identifying false statements, then brainstorming the true intentions/feelings of the characters who say them. Have the students play their scene for the class with some group members reading from the text and others reading the characters' “inner monologues.” Afterwards, discuss similarities and differences in scene interpretation.

What Will People Do for Power?

Richard will do anything to remove the obstacles between himself and the throne, and he shares his plots with the audience as the play proceeds. Make a list of everything that Richard does—everyone that he betrays, lies to and kills—in order to gain the crown for himself. How many people does Richard kill to get what he wants? Discuss what might happen to such a “ruler” in today's world?

First Ladies — Now and Then

Medieval England was a patriarchal society. Women, even queens, did not have much power without their husbands. Queen Elizabeth, wife to King Edward IV, begins the play in a position of high status and power, but when her husband dies, Richard is able to imprison and execute her family, leaving her powerless and alone. Queen Margaret, too, began her life as a powerful woman leading armies into battle against the Yorks, but when her husband and son were killed, she was left alone to curse the Yorks for the wrongs done to her. Ask students to discuss the role of women in *Richard III*, compared to the role of women in politics now. What is a First Lady's responsibility in modern times? What was a Queen's responsibility in medieval times? Ask students to imagine the fate of young Elizabeth, whose marriage is arranged with Richmond to secure his political power. Ask students to write two diary entries from young Elizabeth's perspective, one dated during the events of the play, and one dated at a time in Elizabeth's future. Share diary entries and compare ideas about Elizabeth's future life.

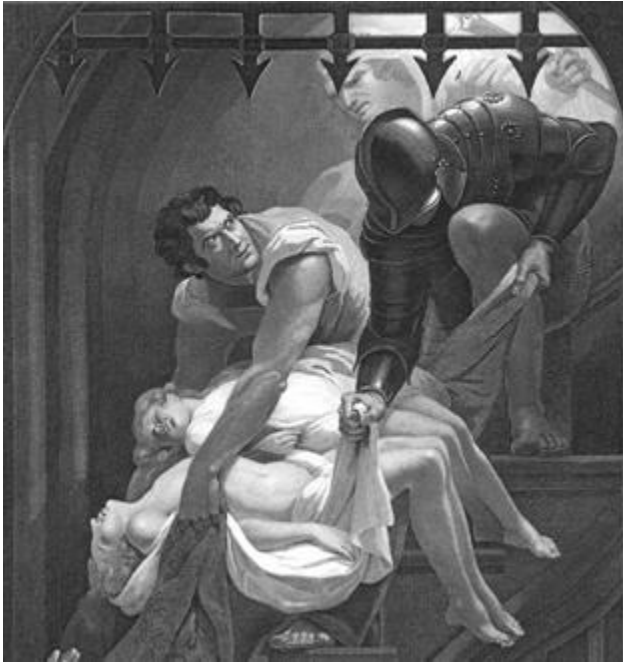


Genevieve Ward as Queen Margaret at the Lyceum Theatre, 1896.

Mander and Mitchenson Theatre Collection.

Classroom Connections

...After the performance



Library of Congress

Burial of the Young Princes in the Tower by James Northcote, engraved for Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery, 1795.



The Tragedy of Richard

The full title of Shakespeare's play is *The Tragedy of Richard III*. What is the catalyst for the tragedy? What action sets the plot in motion? Is the story a tragedy, and is Richard III a tragic hero? Would we consider him a hero in the 21st century? Why or why not?



Bedtime in the Tower of London

Audiences meet the two young princes with their uncle Richard right before they leave for the Tower of London. They never see the pair again or learn anything about their time in the Tower—except that it ends in murder. In pairs, have students read aloud from the beginning of act 3, scene 1, until the princes' exit after line 153. Then have the pairs improvise a scene between the two boys on their first night in the Tower. What do they think of their uncle's reasons for sending them there? How do they feel about staying there? After the pairs have created this scene, introduce a third character—the murderer, Tyrrel. Ask students to create another dialogue around this new turn of events. Present the two scenes to share with the class.



Interpreting History

Over the years, there has been a great deal of discussion about the accuracy of Shakespeare's portrayal of Richard III and the motives for reworking specific historical events for his play. Have the class brainstorm the major events in the lives of one of the following figures or another historical personality:

- President George W. Bush
- Martin Luther King, Jr.
- Queen Elizabeth I

Divide the class into groups to write a scene-by-scene outline or storyboard for a play about the life of this historical figure. Groups may take artistic license to adjust events and character traits where necessary to fit their message. Have each group present their play to the class and discuss the role of the playwright as historian.



Lets Get Critical

The director and design team for the Shakespeare Theatre Company's *Richard III* had a concept, or artistic vision, for this production. Ask students to write a review of *Richard III*, describing what they thought the story of the play was, and how the set, lights, sound and costumes helped to tell the story (or detracted from it). In their critiques, students should select a particular scene to support their opinions. Share the reviews in class and discuss the similarities or differences of opinion. Collect all the reviews and send to the Shakespeare Theatre Company Education Department.



Safe Violence

In Shakespeare's plays, staging violence is very important. Certified professionals work with actors to choreograph violence that looks real, tells a clear story and maintains safety for everyone involved. Ask students what they thought about the staged violence in the production at the Shakespeare Theatre Company. What elements of the staged violence were effective, and what, if anything, was not successful. Students can practice safe and effective physical story-telling by having a slow-motion food fight. Instruct students to split into two groups and line up on either side of the room. Each student should imagine they are holding a tray full of food. Ask students to be very specific about what food is on their tray, and experiment by picking up different types of food (e.g. spaghetti, pudding, soup, a dinner roll, a ketchup bottle). Coach students to cross the room toward the other team, always in super-slow motion, and make eye contact with another student. Once eye contact has been established, students can continue their slow-motion imaginary food fight. Coach students to stay in slow motion and tell a clear and engaging story. What kinds of engaging stories did students see their classmates perform? Ask students why they think working in slow motion is important to story-telling and safety, and what they learned about story-telling from participating in the slow-motion food fight.