

The  
**SHAKESPEARE**  
Theatre of  
New Jersey

Bonnie J. Monte  
*Artistic Director*



# RICHARD III

by William Shakespeare

a study guide

compiled and arranged by  
the Education Department of  
The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey

# *RICHARD III*

## *a study guide*

a support packet for studying the play and attending The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey's Main Stage production

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The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey is an independent, professional theatre located on the Drew University campus.

The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey's programs are made possible, in part, by funding from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts/ Department of State, a Partner Agency of the National Endowment for the Arts, as well as funds from the National Endowment for the Arts. Additional major support is received from The Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, the F. M. Kirby Foundation, The Edward T. Cone Foundation, The Shubert Foundation and Drew University, as well as contributions from numerous corporations, foundations, government agencies and individuals. Crystal Rock Bottled Water is the official water supplier of The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey.

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# CLASSROOM

## FOR TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

What we hear most from educators is that there is a great deal of anxiety when it comes to Shakespeare; seeing it, reading it and especially teaching it. One of the principal goals of the Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey’s Education Programs is to demystify Shakespeare, take him “off the shelf” and re-energize his work for students and teachers alike. Toward these goals, this Study Guide provides educators with tools to both allay their own concerns and to expand the theatre-going experience for their students beyond the field trip to the Shakespeare Theatre.

The information included in this study guide will help you expand your students’ understanding of Shakespeare in performance, as well as help you meet many of the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards. We encourage you to impart as much of the information included in this study guide to your students as is possible. The following are some suggestions from teachers on how you can utilize elements of the study guide given limited classroom time.

Many teachers have found that distributing or reading the one-page “BRIEF SYNOPSIS” has greatly increased students’ understanding and enjoyment of the production. It provides the students with a general understanding of what they will be seeing and what they can expect. Some teachers have simply taken the last five minutes of a class period to do this with very positive results.

When more class time is available prior to your visit, we recommend incorporating the background information on William Shakespeare and the play itself. One teacher divided her class into groups and assigned each group research topics based on the divisions found in the study guide. Using a copy of the corresponding study guide page as a launch pad, the students had one week to research the topics. The students then presented their information to the class in three- to five-minute oral reports. Including the questions that evolved from the presentations, the entire project took only one class period. I am told that the reading of Old English and Middle English texts was “quite entertaining and very informative.”

Using the questions found in the “TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION,” many teachers will opt to take a class period after the trip to The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey to discuss the play with their students. The questions help keep the comments focused on the production, while incorporating various thematic and social issues that are found in the play.

One school spent two days working through performance-based activities (a few of which are suggested in the “FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES” section) with a particularly “difficult and rowdy” class. They were astounded with the results. Their students took the opportunity to “ham it up,” and discovered a great joy and understanding from performing Shakespeare.

To learn more about these and many other suggestions for engaging your students, I encourage you to join us this summer for our acclaimed summer professional development institute for teachers, *ShakeFest*. Again, we hope you will incorporate as many portions of this study guide as you are able into your classroom experience. If you have any suggestions for activities or topics not already found in the study guide, please contact our education department. We are always interested in hearing new ways to excite young people (and teachers) about Shakespeare and live theatre.

### “What’s My Line?” Promoting Active Listening

Teacher-tested, student-approved! Try this exercise with your students:

Before attending the production, give each student one line from the play to listen for. Discuss the meaning of the line and encourage their input in deciphering what Shakespeare meant by the line. How would the student perform the line? Why is the line important to the play? Does it advance the plot, or give the audience particular insight into a character or relationship?

Following the production, discuss the line again. Did the actor present the line in the way your student expected? If not, how was it different?

Happy Teaching,



Brian B. Crowe, Director of Education



ACTIVITIES

# Shakespeare: Helpful Tips For Exploring & Seeing His Works

## “Just plunge right in

(to Shakespeare). See a play, read it aloud, rent a video, listen to a tape. It’s up to you. When you look at Shakespeare close up, he’s not as intimidating as when he’s seen from afar.”

Norrie Epstein  
*The Friendly Shakespeare*

Tragedy can have humor, and  
great comedy always has  
elements of the tragic.

Eighteenth-century critics complained that Shakespeare’s tragedies weren’t consistently serious enough. According to the classic rules, tragedy should be uniformly somber. Shakespeare’s use of humor in his tragedies prevents us from becoming washed away in a dense fog of emotion. Rather, it forces us out of the “tragic” long enough to appreciate the level to which the play’s passions have taken us.

“Some of the plays have taken on mythic proportions. By myths, I mean we grow up knowing certain things about [Shakespeare’s] characters but we don’t know how we know them.

There are lots of  
**SHAKESPEAREAN MICROCHIPS**  
lodged in our brains.”

Charles Marowitz, director

“It was Olivier’s *Henry V*  
that made me realize that

Shakespeare is  
about real  
people  
and that his language  
wasn’t simply beautiful  
poetry.”

Robert Brustein, director



“My advice to anyone seeing Shakespeare:

## Don’t worry so much!

Just make sure your ears are clean and your eyes are sharp. Listen and look and watch.

Look at the distance people stand from each other; look at the relationships being developed.

## Stay with it.

Don’t negate the move that Shakespeare will make toward your gut, toward your soul--

because he will touch you there,  
if you allow yourself to be touched.”

David Suchet, actor

“There are some parts of the plays you’ll never understand. But excuse me, I thought that’s what great art was supposed to be about.

# DON’T FREAK OUT OVER IT!”

Peter Sellars,  
Director

Don’t be afraid to  
**LISTEN, WATCH AND REACT;**  
laugh, cry, and be moved.

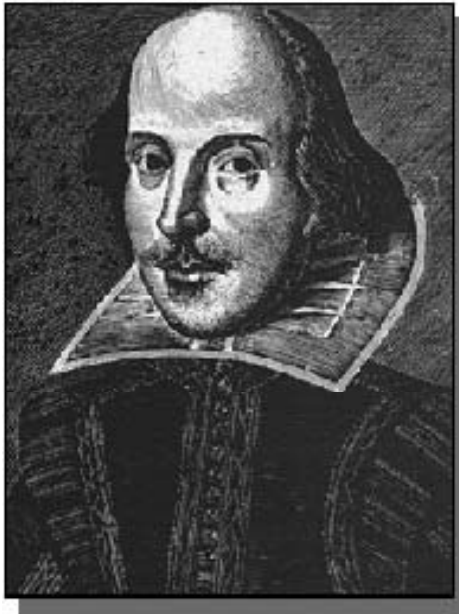
Shakespeare wrote for  
a live and active audience.

Both audience and actor  
must be involved to create  
a truly winning performance.

# The Life of William Shakespeare

William Shakespeare, recognized as the greatest English dramatist, was born on April 23, 1564. He was the third of eight children born to John Shakespeare and Mary Arden of Stratford-on-Avon in Warwickshire, England. Shakespeare's father was a prominent local merchant, and Shakespeare's childhood, though little is known about it for certain, appears to have been quite normal. In fact, it seems that the young Shakespeare was allowed considerable leisure time because his writing contains extensive knowledge of hunting and hawking. In 1582 he married Anne Hathaway, the daughter of a farmer. She was eight years his senior, and the match was considered unconventional.

It is believed that Shakespeare left Stratford-on-Avon and went to London around 1588. By 1592 he was a successful actor and playwright. He wrote 38 plays, two epic poems, and over 150 sonnets. His work



was immensely popular, appealing to members of all social spheres including Queen Elizabeth I and King James I. While they were well-liked, Shakespeare's plays were not considered by his educated contemporaries to be exceptional. By 1608 Shakespeare's involvement with theatre began to dwindle, and he spent more time at his country home in Stratford. He died in 1616.

Most of Shakespeare's plays found their first major publication in 1623, seven years after Shakespeare's death, when two of his fellow actors put the plays together in the First Folio. Other early printings of Shakespeare's plays were called quartos, a printer's term referring to the format in which the publication was laid out. These quartos and the First Folio texts are the sources of all modern printings of Shakespeare's plays.

## Shakespeare's London

London, in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, was a bustling urban center filled with a wide variety of people and cultures. Although most life centered around making a living or going to church, the main source of diversion for Londoners was the theatre. It was a form of entertainment accessible to people of all classes. The rich and the poor, the aristocrats and the beggars all met at the theatre. Though often appeasing the church or the monarchy, theatre at this time did experience a freedom that was unknown in previous generations. Evidence of this can be found in the numerous bawdy and pagan references found in Shakespeare's plays. This relative artistic license and freedom of expression made theatre extremely unpopular among certain members of society, and it was later banned entirely by the Puritans. Not until the reign of Charles II (1660-1685) was the theatre restored to the status it held in Shakespeare's day.

The Globe Theatre, the resident playhouse for Shakespeare's company of actors, was easily accessible to Londoners and an active social center. Actors and performers were also regularly brought to court or to private homes to entertain. Despite their social popularity, actors maintained a relatively low status, sometimes no better than a common beggar or rogue. Most performers were forced to earn a living doing trade work. The aristocracy's desire for entertainment, however, did spur the development of numerous new theatre pieces. Often a nobleman would become a patron to an artist or company of actors, providing for their financial needs and sheltering them to some degree from official sanctions. In return, the company would adopt the name of the patron. Shakespeare's acting company was originally named "Lord Chamberlain's Men" after their patron, Henry Carey, Lord Chamberlain. Later,

under the patronage of King James I, they were known as "The King's Men," an unprecedented honor at the time.

Despite the flourishing of the arts at this time, London was sometimes a desolate place. Outbreaks of the Black Plague (the bubonic plague) frequently erupted, killing thousands of citizens. Theatres, shops, and the government were all shut down during these times in hopes of preventing the spread of the disease. Elizabethans were unaware that the disease was being spread by the flea and rat populations, which well outnumbered the human population of London.



### The Sonnets

You might have thought that Shakespeare wrote the sonnets earlier in his career, as a type of "stepping stone" to his plays. However, Shakespeare actually penned most of his sonnets during the various outbreaks of the plague in London, when the theatres were closed.

# Are You SURE This Is English?

Contrary to popular belief, Shakespeare and his contemporaries did not write in Old English, or even Middle English. **PLAYWRIGHTS OF THE 16TH AND EARLY 17TH CENTURIES WROTE IN MODERN ENGLISH.** Shakespeare spoke (and wrote in) the same language which we speak today. It is possible to be thrown a bit by grammatical “carry-overs” from earlier English [“thee” and “thou” instead of “you”] and the poetic liberties that Shakespeare took, but there is no doubt that the words and syntax used in his plays can be understood today without any “translation.” To help clarify this point, here are some examples of Old, Middle and Modern English.

## Old English (500 - 1150 CE)

When Julius Caesar invaded Britain in BC 55-4, the Celtic (pronounced KEL-tic) tribes lived in the British Isles. Their languages survive today in the forms of Gaelic (Scotland and Ireland), Welsh (Wales) and Manx (Isle of Man). The Romans brought Latin to Britain. However, early English developed primarily from the language of tribes which invaded and settled England from what is now Germany. This language, known as Old English, was also influenced by the Latin spoken by Catholic missionaries from Rome as well as the Scandinavian dialects of Viking raiders and settlers.

### selection from *Beowulf* author unknown, ca 800 CE

Oft Scyld Scefing sceaðena prëstum,  
monegum mægðum meodo-setla oftëah,  
egsode eorlas. Syððan ærert wearð  
fëasceaft funden, hë þæs frofre gebåd,  
wëox under wolcnum, weorð-myndum þäh,  
oð-þæt him aeghwylc ymb-sittendra  
ofer hron-råde hýran scolde,  
gomban gyldan. þæt wæs god cyning!

## Middle English (1150 - 1500 CE)

The conquest of England by the Norman army in 1066 brought great changes to English life and the English language. The Old French spoken by the Normans became for many years the language of the Royal Court and of English literature. Over time, the spoken English still used by the lower classes borrowed about 10,000 words from French, as well as certain grammatical structures. By the time English reappeared as a written, literary language in the 14th century, it only distantly resembled Old English. This German-French hybrid language is known as Middle English.

### selection from *The Canterbury Tales* by Geoffrey Chaucer, ca 1390 CE

But natheless / while I haue tyme and space  
Er that I ferther / in this tale pace  
Me thynketh it acordant to resoun  
To telle yow / al the condiciun  
Of eeche of hem / so as it seemed to me  
And whiche they weere / and of what degree  
And eek in what array / that they were inne  
And at a knyght thanne wol I first bigynne.

## Modern English (1450 - present day)

With the invention of the printing press in the 15th century, the English language began to develop and mutate at an unprecedented rate. Books, previously a precious and expensive commodity, were now widely available to anyone with basic literacy. Works in Latin, Italian, Spanish, French and Portuguese were being translated by the hundreds, and the translators found it necessary to borrow and invent thousands of new words. English trade and exploration fueled even more cultural and linguistic exchange. The early Modern English of Shakespeare and his contemporaries has been referred to as “English in its adolescence”: daring, experimental, innovative and irreverent.

### selection from *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare, ca 1595 CE

*Well, you have made a simple choice; you know not how to choose a man: Romeo! No, not he; though his face be better than any man's, yet his leg excels all men's; and for a hand, and a foot, and a body, though they be not to be talked on, yet they are past compare...*

### What did Shakespeare sound like?

While we may associate Shakespeare with the “refined” British accent of an Ian McKellen or Judi Dench, linguistic scholars say that the closest approximation to the London accent of Shakespeare’s day is the accent heard nowadays in the Appalachian region of the United States.

### IN MODERN ENGLISH TRANSLATION:

*Oft Scyld the Scefing from squadroned foes,  
from many a tribe, the mead-bench tore,  
awing the earls. Since first he lay  
friendless, a foundling, fate repaid him:  
for he waxed under welkin, in wealth he throve,  
till before him the folk, both far and near,  
who lived by the whale-path, heard his mandate,  
gave him gift: a good king he!*

### IN MODERN ENGLISH TRANSLATION:

*But nonetheless, while I have time and space  
Before I continue in this story  
I think it appropriate to speak of,  
To tell you, the condition  
Of each of them, as it seemed to me.  
And who was who, and of what degree,  
And in what fashion each was dressed.  
And with a knight then I will begin.*

## Richard III: A Brief Synopsis

As the play opens, Richard, Duke of Gloucester, reveals to the audience his plans to depose his brother, King Edward IV, and to cement his own claim to the throne by marrying Lady Anne, the young widow of Edward of Lancaster.

Richard sets his plans in motion by poisoning King Edward's mind against their only other surviving brother, George, Duke of Clarence, resulting in Clarence's arrest and imprisonment. Meanwhile, as Anne travels to the funeral of her late father-in-law, King Henry VI, Richard intercepts her and professes his love for her. At first, she is shocked and repulsed, given his role in the deaths of her husband, father-in-law and father. However, Richard's smooth-tongued charisma convinces her of his repentance and wins her over.

As Richard's schemes begin to unfold, the palace is troubled by news of King Edward's worsening health. His wife, Queen Elizabeth, is fearful of the implications of this illness and the divisions within the royal family. Richard's ally, Buckingham, tries to reassure her that Edward will recover and that the three brothers will be reconciled, and Richard himself accuses her of being responsible for turning Edward against Clarence. Only Margaret, Henry VI's widow and a prisoner in the court, clearly and vehemently accuses Richard.

Richard hires two murderers to assassinate his brother Clarence in his prison cell. News of the killing is brought to King Edward, now near death himself. He is shocked, believing that he had repealed Clarence's death sentence, but Richard informs him that the order arrived too late. The news is the final blow to the ailing king, who collapses and dies shortly thereafter.

Buckingham announces that he will personally escort the king's young son, Edward, Prince of Wales, to London for his coronation. As the royal family awaits his return, Elizabeth learns that Richard has ordered the arrest of her brother, Lord Rivers. Knowing that Buckingham is closely allied to Richard, Elizabeth fears that Prince Edward's "escort" is in fact his captor, and she goes into hiding with her younger son, the Duke of York.

The boy-prince reaches London, and is frightened to learn that his mother and brother have fled the city. Buckingham tells Cardinal Bouchier to persuade the queen to return the second boy to London, or he will be brought back by force. Richard suggests that both boys move to the Tower of London (conveniently both a royal fortress and a royal prison), and the princes are reluctantly installed there.

Richard sends another ally, Sir William Catesby, to gain the support of Hastings, the Lord Chamberlain. Hastings welcomes the news of Rivers' execution, but he refuses to support Richard's claim to the throne.

The nobles gather at the tower to plan the Prince's coronation as Edward V when Richard arrives abruptly and accuses Elizabeth of witchcraft. When Hastings scoffs at this claim, Richard orders his execution, then puts on a show of sorrow over his death.

With this last major obstacle removed, Richard instructs Buckingham to persuade the Mayor and citizens of London that both the princes and their father were illegitimately conceived. With popular sentiment turned against the princes, Buckingham will then lead a delegation of concerned citizens to petition Richard to take the throne himself. The conspirators skillfully manage this public

relations maneuver. Buckingham arrives with the Londoners, only to be told by Catesby that Richard is deep in prayer. Finally Richard appears and Buckingham begs him, in the name of the people, to assume the throne. Richard at first refuses, but as the crowd begins to disperse, he calls them back and "reluctantly" accepts.

Elizabeth, the Duchess of York, and Lady Anne (now Richard's wife) arrive at the Tower of London to visit the princes. They are denied entry, and told that Lady Anne has been summoned to Westminster to be crowned queen. All three women are stunned, and even Richard's mother the Duchess fears his motives. She urges Elizabeth's remaining son from her first marriage, Dorset, to flee to France to join Henry Tudor, the Earl of Richmond, a Lancastrian supporter in exile.

Richard is crowned King of England, and determines that his nephews must be put to death. Even Buckingham hesitates at this step, seeing no compelling need for them to murder the young boys, so Richard hires Sir James Tyrrel to carry out the murders, and scornfully dismisses Buckingham. The king also orders Catesby to inform the public that Queen Anne is dying, clearing the way for him to marry his niece, Princess Elizabeth, the princes' older sister.

As the princes are put to death, word comes that Queen Anne has died. However, Richard's triumph is short-lived, as news swiftly follows that Buckingham has rebelled against him and joined his forces with Richmond's approaching army. Elizabeth and the Duchess of York lament the death of the princes, but Margaret exults that her Yorkist enemies are finally suffering the same fate they visited on her own family. Richard intrudes on the women's grief to inform Queen Elizabeth, to her horror, of his plans to marry her daughter.

Catesby brings news that Richmond is landing in southern England, joining with Buckingham's army. Richard mobilizes his own allies. With the support of the nobles falling away, and rebellion breaking out in multiple locations, Richard forces the Earl of Derby (Richmond's stepfather) to join his cause by taking his son, George Stanley, hostage.

One stroke of luck comes Richard's way, in the form of floods that disperse Buckingham's troops and lead to his capture by the king's agents. As he is led to execution, Buckingham laments his participation in Richard's crimes. Without Buckingham's aid, Richmond goes to meet King Richard at Bosworth Field with an army only a third the size of the king's. However, Derby secretly visits Richmond in his camp and promises to turn his troops against Richard on the day of battle.

The night before the battle, both Richard and Richmond are visited in their sleep by the ghosts of all those who have died at Richard's hands, who promise the crown to Richmond. Learning at dawn that Derby has deserted to Richmond's side with his men, Richard orders his son executed, but the nobles refuse to carry out the order.

On the battlefield, Richard and Richmond meet in personal combat and Richard is killed. Derby recovers the crown and presents it to Richmond, who orders all nobles killed in the battle to be buried with honors. He announces that he will marry Princess Elizabeth, reuniting the Houses of Lancaster and York, as well as the English nation.

# Sources and History of the Play

As was his custom in developing his history plays, Shakespeare seems to have started with Raphael Holinshed's extremely popular *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland*. While a 2,835-page history book might not be guaranteed a spot on contemporary bestseller lists, Holinshed's tome, the first attempt at a truly comprehensive account of British history, was eagerly read in an era in which both literacy and nationalism were rapidly expanding in England.

While not researched or attributed in a way that modern historians would find sound, Holinshed's team was generally thorough in at least naming its sources, and Shakespeare was evidently able to refer to many of those sources in writing *Richard III*. Most significant were Edward Hall's 1550 history of the War of the Roses, *The Union of the Two Noble and Illustrious Families of Lancaster and York*, and Sir Thomas More's posthumous *Life of Richard the Third*.

The historical furor that has surrounded Shakespeare's play for hundreds of years derives from the fact that all of these sources were written under the rule of the Tudor kings and queens who supplanted the historical King Richard, and are of questionable veracity at best. More himself was only a 7-year-old boy when King Richard died at Bosworth Field, and probably depended on his patron, Cardinal John Morton, for most of the information in the book. Morton had been an ardent Lancastrian, a reluctant member of Edward IV's government, and a vehement opponent of Richard. Morton appears briefly as a character in Shakespeare's play—in Act Three, Richard makes small talk with him about the strawberries in his garden before having him arrested along with Hastings. Clearly Morton can hardly be relied on as a disinterested witness to history.

Adding to the strangeness of More's account is the fact that the author had little reason to produce a glowing tribute to Henry VII, who had imprisoned More's father for life. Some historians speculate that More was only transcribing Morton's words; others that More's allusions to Richard's outrageous crimes (always attributed in terms like "some say") were meant ironically, as a parody of actual Tudor propaganda.

Whatever the truth of the matter, Shakespeare wrote More's speculations into his play as fact, and expanded on them, making Richard more deformed and diabolical than in any published source. To this day, Shakespeare is bitterly accused of character assassination by many who point to substantial evidence that Richard was an excellent king and quite possibly guiltless of his nephews' (alleged) murder.

However, Shakespeare had no choice but to portray Henry VII as his nation's savior. In 1592 or 1593, when the play was probably written, Elizabeth I was in the last decade of her life, and the nation was fearfully anticipating the very real possibility of a violent struggle over who would succeed the childless queen. Throughout her reign, Elizabeth faced constant questions about the legitimacy of the Tudor dynasty, and threats to her life—any hint that Richard III's overthrow by her grandfather was less than a divine intervention would have been tantamount to treason in the charged atmosphere of the 1590s. Only a handful of years later, Shakespeare's company would barely avoid criminal charges over the content of *Richard II*. Through strict censorship and selective patronage of

writers, Elizabeth and her father and grandfather had been able to carefully control the public perception of their dynasty, and no threat to that image was too small to go unnoticed.

It should also be remembered that *Richard III* was written as the conclusion to a four-play series depicting the brutal struggles for power that came to be known as the War of the Roses. In the *Henry VI/Richard III* tetralogy, Shakespeare's intent, as he compresses and rearranges historical events, seems to be less about creating an accurate account of English history, and more about creating a thrilling and cautionary tale about the lust for power, the abuse of power, and the dire effects these have upon the nation. In this last play, Shakespeare clearly and blatantly departs from historical fact by including Henry VI's widow, Margaret of Anjou, as a kind of chorus lurking around the royal palace to remind everyone (including the audience) that Richard's crimes are only the culmination of a whole series of ruthless and grisly acts by the contending dynasties of Lancaster and York. Richard comes to seem less like a human being, and more like an instrument of divine retribution: "Thou cam'st on earth to make the earth my hell," his mother says to him towards the end of the play.

In creating an epic symbol of tyranny and misrule, rather than a historical monarch, Shakespeare made it possible for *Richard III* to become one of the Bard's most-produced history plays, particularly outside of England. Numerous productions have transported the play in time and space, using the character of Richard to address other examples of ruthless political evil. Richard Loncraine's 1995 film, starring Ian McKellen, set the play in an alternate 1930s England where Richard rises to power as a Fascist dictator.

One final fact of *Richard III* is that, for generations, the play was only performed in a 1700 adaptation by Colley Cibber. *Richard III* is Shakespeare's longest play except for *Hamlet*, and 18th- and 19th-century critics generally regarded the original as too tedious and confusing to be staged. Cibber cut the play to half its length, picking the action up with Edward IV's death (thus completely eliminating the famous opening soliloquy), eliminating Queen Margaret, and adding new scenes, such as a graphic onstage death for the young princes. Cibber's version was by no means universally praised (Alexander Pope described it as the "miserable mutilation...of hapless Shakespeare" and Cibber's own performance as Richard as "the distorted heavings of an unjointed caterpillar"), but it retained its supremacy through the mid-19th century.

Today, *Richard III*, like *Hamlet*, is still rarely produced at its uncut length of almost four hours. Directors generally choose to make significant cuts, if not with quite the same audacity as Colley Cibber.

## An Elizabethan Best-Seller

No fewer than six quarto editions of *Richard III* were published before the play appeared in the 1623 First Folio, an indicator of the appeal it had for Shakespeare's public.



# Commentary and Criticism

“[*Richard III* was Shakespeare’s] first historic tragedy with well-knit dramatic action. The earlier ‘histories’ were still half epical; this is a true drama. It quickly became one of the most effective and popular pieces on the stage, and has imprinted itself on the memory of all the world in virtue of the monumental character of its protagonist.”

Michael Hattaway  
*The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare*

“[Richard III was] a royal usurper, a princely hypocrite, a tyrant and a murderer of the house of Plantagenet.”

William Hazlitt

“It has everything a drama should have: sublime writing, an exciting plot, and gripping characters, and as long as one doesn’t accept it as historical fact, we can enjoy it for what it is, the best and the most influential work of Ricardian fiction, and certainly in a class by itself.”

Roxane C. Murph

“*Richard III* is so full of harrowing and dramatic episodes, and Richard III himself is so successful a character, so wonderful a villain, with so much bravery and dry humor mingled with his monstrous behavior, that the play pleased all and made it quite plain that Shakespeare was a new star of brilliant magnitude on the literary scene.”

Isaac Asimov  
*Asimov’s Guide to Shakespeare*

“The audience appeal of Shakespeare’s play... has not been generated through derision of the historical King Richard III. Rather, audiences have been fascinated with the play’s great central figure, the physically and morally grotesque character named Richard III, in whom Shakespeare embodied our universal fears and desires.”

James A. Moore  
“Historicity in Shakespeare’s *Richard III*”

“Departing from his sources, Shakespeare constructs a remarkably funny tyrant... Despite the play’s relentless curses, guilty confessions and dire prophecies, Elizabethans could also laugh at, and with, Shakespeare’s jokey religious hypocrite, appreciate satiric resemblances between the twisted spin-master and contemporary politicians, and perhaps admire his social-climbing audacity.”

James Siemon

“In the opening monologue of the play *Richard III*, Shakespeare depicts the very essence of evil—crooked, twisted; full of hate, fury, envy, and malice... From the facts known of his life, this unremitting portrait of evil cannot be accurate. Yet Shakespeare’s characterization of this most wicked of English kings, written over a hundred years after Richard’s death, has endured.”

Sharon Michalove  
“The Reinvention of Richard III”

“Shakespeare made the worst of Richard III, and Richard III brought out the best in Shakespeare.”

Jeremy Potter

## Shakespeare’s Influence

“King Richard III, the only English ruler since the Norman Conquest to have been killed in battle, is also the only one to have become a legend... due to Shakespeare.”

John Julius Norwich  
*Shakespeare’s English Kings*



A 16th century depiction of King Richard III. National Portrait Gallery, London.

## Law and Order: Shakespeare Victims Unit?

In 1984, London Weekend Television produced a televised trial of King Richard III for the murder of his nephews. Professional lawyers were hired for the defense and the prosecution, expert witnesses were called on both sides, and a jury was selected from a broad cross-section of the public. They returned a unanimous verdict of “not guilty.”

# Shakespeare's Common Tongue

- alack**- expression of dismay or shock
- anon**- soon, right away
- ere**- before
- hath**- has
- hence**- away (from here)
- henceforth**- from now on
- hither**- here
- lest**- or else
- naught**- nothing
- oft**- often
- perchance**- by chance, perhaps, maybe
- sirrah**- "hey, you" as said to a servant or someone of lower status
- thee**- you
- thence**-away, over there
- thine**- yours
- thither**- there
- thou**- you
- thy**- your
- whence**- where
- wherefore**- why
- whither**- where

## ... and the "thys" have it

Often Shakespeare will alternate his usage of "thou" for "you", or "thy" for "your", or "thine" for "yours". Though the words are synonymous, there is a great deal of information that can be obtained by looking closely at these choices.

The different use of these pronouns have to do with status, relationship, degrees of intimacy and shifting attitudes. "You" is used in formal situations and conveys respect from the speaker. It is used when addressing royalty and parents. "Thou," used in more informal settings, also can suggest contempt or aggression from the speaker. The use of "thou" places the speaker above the status of the person to whom s/he is speaking. Children are addressed using "thou," thee" or "thy." In a conversation between two people of equal status, the use of "you" suggests that everything is going along smoothly, whereas "thou" would suggest that there is some kind of upset or unrest in the relationship.

These general guidelines can be used to give a vast insight into the emotional and social navigation of a character.

# Terms and Phrases Found In *Richard III*

## ACT I

- naught** – nothing (or, depending on the context, evil)
- falchion** – a slightly curved sword
- moiety** – portion, half
- noble** – a coin worth approximately 1/3 pound
- hap** – fortune, chance
- iwis** – certainly
- cacodemon** – an evil spirit
- surfeit** – excess, overindulgence
- elvish-marked** – birthmarked or deformed (believed to be caused by elves)
- malapert** – saucy, impudent
- mewed-up** – caged
- Zounds** – a strong oath (a contraction of "by God's wounds")
- sop** – dry bread or cake soaked in wine
- malmsey butt** – a barrel of sweet wine
- meed** – reward, merit

## ACT II

- nonage** – young age
- embassage** – ambassador, envoy
- cordial** – an invigorating or medicinal drink
- semblance** – appearance
- wot** – knows
- politic** – wise, prudent
- parlous** – perilous(ly)
- go to** – an expression of impatience, like "come on!"

## ACT III

- prating** – chattering
- complots** – conspiracies
- betimes** – early
- digest** – arrange
- shriving work** – confession and absolution
- foot-cloth horse** – a horse adorned with an ornamental cloth as a sign of the rider's status
- conversation** – a euphemism for a sexual affair
- Guildhall** – the meeting hall of the mercantile corporation of London
- Baynard's Castle** – Richard's London residence on the north shore of the Thames River

- set hand** – the style of handwriting used for copying legal documents
- recorder** – a municipal legal clerk
- bark** – boat
- brook** – endure
- declension** – falling away

## ACT IV

- cockatrice** – a mythical creature whose gaze could kill
- humor** – temperament
- wont** – accustomed
- Brecknock** – Buckingham's family estate in southeast Wales
- crazed** – cracked
- caitiff** – wretch, slave
- cozen** – to cheat
- King's King** – God
- recomforture** – consolation
- competitions** – associates

## ACT V

- battalia** – main body of troops in the battle formation
- beaver** – visor of a knight's helmet
- pursuivant-at-arms** – a junior officer attending on a herald
- peise** – weigh
- fulsome** – cloying, excessive
- caparison** – to deck out
- overweening** – arrogant
- welkin** – the sky

## A Man of Many Words

Shakespeare used over **20,000 different words** in his plays and poems. Of these, 8.5% (1700 words) had never been seen in print before Shakespeare used them. To give you a sense of just how extraordinary this is, consider that the King James Bible uses only 8,000 different words. Homer is credited with using approximately 9,000 different words in his works. Milton is estimated at using 10,000 different words in his works.

# Richard III: Food For Thought

## Mysterious Margaret

Margaret of Anjou, the widow of King Henry VI, appears at various times in the play to curse Richard and warn of his impending doom. In reality, Margaret was not present for *any* of the events that Shakespeare depicts.

Although she was temporarily a prisoner of King Edward IV, she had been ransomed by Louis XI in 1475, and was living in poverty in her native France at the time of Clarence's arrest. Lonely and embittered, Margaret never returned to the country she had once nearly ruled on her husband's behalf, dying in 1482, almost a full year before Richard III's accession to the English throne.

Shakespeare was well aware of these facts, but seems to have been unconcerned about letting them get in the way of some great curses.

## "Blood will have blood, they say..."

One of the innovations of the theatre of Shakespeare's day was the more realistic (and gory) depiction of stage violence. In the earlier Greek theatre, violence was never shown. The audience was informed of a murder or a great battle by a messenger. No one ever saw the events on stage.

In Shakespeare's London, however, theatre companies competed to present plays with "shock and splatter." As with today's horror movies, a thrillingly graphic death scene could help a play sell many more tickets.

Since the washable synthetic "stage blood" of today had not yet been developed, theatres obtained large quantities of pig's blood from slaughterhouses for use on stage. One can only imagine the work involved in laundering the costumes between performances.

## Ghosts

The Elizabethan idea of a ghost was somewhat different than how we might think of a ghost today. They were not believed to be wispy air-like entities, but as having the appearance and solidity of the living. Ghosts also always came with a mission; to warn the living, to revenge or expose a murder, or to punish someone. Ghosts were a very popular device in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama.

## Nighttime in Shakespeare's Time

The Elizabethans believed that night was the time of spirits, demons and ghosts. Though many contemporary thinkers would scoff at such a notion, one must consider what nighttime was like for the Elizabethans. In pre-modern times, the night lacked the artificial glow that chases away complete darkness today. Only the moon, stars and scattered lanterns and candles illuminated the Elizabethan night.

In the dim flicker of these limited light sources, it is easy to imagine supernatural encounters. A dead tree jostled in a breeze can be transformed into a hideous monster, a darting bird can become a fleeing spirit. Because these sights were never seen in the bright daytime, Elizabethans believed that ghosts held domain over the night, and the first signs of the dawn (such as the crowing rooster) chased evil spirits away.

## What's in a name? (Or, who ARE these guys?)

One of the confusing aspects of trying to follow Shakespeare's history plays, in particular the *Henry VI/Richard III* tetralogy, is the fact that the same characters seem to be known by several different names in the course of each play.

Even in medieval England, everyone of noble blood had a first name and surname, just as we do today, although their surnames aren't mentioned as often in the plays. Edward IV, Richard III, George of Clarence and the unlucky princes are all Plantagenets. Queen Elizabeth was formerly Elizabeth Woodville, and her brother (Lord Rivers) was born plain Anthony Woodville.

More important than surnames amongst a feudal nobility where everyone seems to be everyone else's cousin anyhow are the characters' *titles*. Several dozen highly-placed families controlled almost all the land in England as dukes, earls, and marquesses, including the innumerable cousins of the Plantagenet kings.

Richard III, for instance, is known as Gloucester because his childhood inheritance included the Duchy of Gloucester in southwest England, just as his brother George is usually called Clarence. Similarly Henry Tudor, the future Henry VII, is usually referred to as Richmond, since his title is Earl of Richmond.

When one attained a noble title (a peerage), the way one's name was written changed. On becoming Earl of Derby, Sir Thomas Stanley would have henceforth been Thomas, Lord Stanley, Earl of Derby. The "Lord" before his surname indicates that he is a peer, although his title is "Derby." Sometimes he is called Stanley in the play, and sometimes Derby.

## Oh Henry

While the historical Richard III has been described alternately as a hero and a monster, by almost all accounts Henry Tudor, Earl of Richmond (who became King Henry VII) was a master of cold calculation and political expedience. He cleverly dated his reign from the day *before* Bosworth Field so that those nobles who fought for Richard could be summarily attainted as traitors for raising arms against Henry. Without any recourse to trial, their lives and property were forfeit to the new king.

## Who's afraid of the big bad Richard?

The most famous and iconic portrayal of Shakespeare's evil king was undoubtedly Sir Laurence Olivier's 1955 film version. When it was broadcast on television, more people saw Shakespeare's play in one night than had seen the play throughout its 350-year history.

Olivier later explained how he had created his beaky-nosed Richard: "I'd based the makeup on the American theatre director Jed Harris, the most loathsome man I ever met...He was apparently equally loathed by the man who created the Big Bad Wolf for Walt Disney."

John Lydon, lead singer for the legendary British punk band, The Sex Pistols, would later claim to have modeled his "Johnny Rotten" persona, in turn, on Olivier's Richard III.

# The War of The Roses

Shakespeare wrote four history plays (the three parts of *Henry VI*, and *Richard III*) dealing with the turbulent period of dynastic conflict and intermittent civil war in England between 1455 and 1485 which later came to be known as the War of the Roses. Although the true effects of these wars are still debated by today's historians, there is at least general agreement that they contributed greatly to the decline of the feudal nobility in England, to the rise of a mercantile class, and to the consolidation of power in the hands of the central government. Rightly or wrongly, it was also certainly the perception in Shakespeare's time that the wars had been a deeply traumatic and disruptive period for the nation as a whole.

The set of circumstances which would lead to civil war began more than two generations earlier. King Edward III's numerous children founded several branches of the ruling Plantagenet family, both legitimate and illegitimate. The 1399 coup which deposed Edward's unpopular grandson, Richard II, was led by Henry Bolingbroke, the Duke of Lancaster and one of the many royal cousins. According to the rules of primogeniture (an exclusive right of inheritance belonging to the eldest son), the throne should have passed not to Bolingbroke (descended from Edward's fourth son), but to one of the other cousins. Bolingbroke seized the moment of his initial popularity and military advantage to claim the throne for himself, however, and was named King Henry IV.

Henry IV held his throne with difficulty, never able to fully escape the shadow of the means by which he had obtained it. However, matters changed when he died, leaving the throne to his young son, Henry V. After years of military failure in France, the new king united the country behind a gloriously successful invasion which not only regained England's long-lost French possessions but toppled the French monarchy as well. With England anticipating its imperial status under Henry's infant son, old grudges against the house of Lancaster were temporarily forgotten.

Henry V never lived to enjoy his success, however, leaving his own son Henry to inherit the throne as an infant. A Protectorate was established to govern the country while Henry VI was still a child, made up primarily of assorted royal uncles and cousins, and the buried discontents began to resurface. In part due to these divisions within the royal court, Henry V's military gains in France were whittled away even as royal spending mounted. The trouble only increased as Henry VI grew into a weak and indecisive man who depended entirely on the advice of a trusted few, in particular his French-born queen, Margaret of Anjou. As English armies continued to retreat from France, and taxes and corruption thrived, resentment began to build among the general public, and even more so among those members of the old noble families excluded from the Lancastrian inner circle.

Chief among these was the king's cousin Richard Plantagenet, the Duke of York (father of the eventual Richard III). Richard of York was descended from two of Edward III's sons, and married into the line of descent of another, giving his own sons a far stronger claim to the throne than Henry VI's own son. He was widely respected, especially in the north of England, and was personally more popular than the king. His wife, Cecily Neville, was a daughter of the richest aristocratic family in England, and had helped enable Richard himself to become quite wealthy. As the richest of the royal cousins, Richard was expected to command (and personally finance) the ongoing military campaign in France, even as the king's circle pointedly excluded him from decision-making.

Richard's growing resentment of this situation came to a head when the king recalled him from France, replacing him with their cousin Edmund Beaufort, a detested royal favorite. Richard was dispatched to Ireland, even as he was expected to continue forwarding his personal funds to Beaufort in France. His lack of faith in Beaufort's abilities as a general was well-founded. Almost immediately, Beaufort bungled the campaign in Normandy, and was forced to surrender the entire province to the French, perhaps the most symbolically crushing defeat thus far in the eyes of the English public. Nevertheless, the king let Beaufort retain his command, even as English losses accelerated.

In 1453, on the heels of England's almost complete expulsion from France, Henry VI suffered the first of several nervous breakdowns that were to haunt the last decades of his life. With the king incapacitated, it was necessary to appoint a Council of Regency, and the country was now vehemently opposed to politics as usual. Richard of York was appointed to head the council as Lord Protector, and he moved quickly to curtail the power of the royal favorites. Beaufort was accused of treason and placed under arrest. With the balance of power suddenly tipped, fighting between noble families broke out all over the country as adherents of Richard's faction sought to settle old scores and advance their own positions at the expense of those who had been in favor under the king.

When the king recovered early in 1455 and was able to resume government, battle lines were already effectively drawn between the noble houses who adhered to him (the Lancastrians) and those who adhered to Richard (the Yorkists). According to legend (partly created by Shakespeare) each faction took as its insignia a rose: red for the Lancastrians; white for the Yorkists.

Almost immediately, the king freed Beaufort and removed Richard from office. Unwilling to see the corrupt inner circle returned to power, Richard gathered a small army and marched south to demand that Beaufort and the other "bad councillors" be stripped of office. At the town of St. Albans, just north of London, Richard's force was met by an armed force headed by Henry and Margaret in person. While both sides may have meant only to put on a show of strength, violence broke out and the first real battle of the War of the Roses ensued. It was a humiliating one for the Lancastrians—Beaufort was killed and the king forced to retreat to London—but the fact that Richard had dared to openly attack the king lost him many supporters, at least for a time.

The Lancastrians now knew that Richard was willing to go to almost any length to drive them from power. With Richard temporarily back in Ireland, they called a special session of Parliament that introduced the process of attainder into English law. Through attainder, anyone could be effectively convicted of treason by a mere majority vote of Parliament, making their lives and property forfeit to the crown. In attempting to crush the Yorkists in this way, however, Margaret's faction may have unintentionally driven more supporters into his arms. The aristocracy was understandably unnerved by the sweeping and arbitrary power of attainder. At the same time, the merchants of London and the southern coast, who favored Richard and his nephew-in-law, Warwick, were growing increasingly dissatisfied with the Lancastrian government's indifference to growing piracy and lawlessness that disrupted trade. By 1456, Margaret refused to let Henry return to the capital, keeping the king in the Midlands, where his support was strongest.

By 1459, the Yorkists had regrouped and were able to capitalize on the renewed public disapproval of Henry's reign. Warwick, who had refused to give up command of the English naval stronghold at Calais, launched raids on the southern coast of England, culminating in a 1460 invasion of his native country. The Yorkist army moved easily through the south of England, gathering support along the way. A papal emissary blessed their mission, and they were welcomed by the people of London. Quickly, Henry gathered what support he could and marched south to meet them. At the Battle of Northampton, the Lancastrian army was routed and the king was taken prisoner by Warwick.

Quickly, Richard returned from Ireland as Warwick brought the king back to London and summoned Parliament to consider the question of who should succeed Henry. Richard appeared in person before the assembly to present his claim to the throne. Weary of the ongoing conflict, and longing for a stable and effective national government, Parliament resolved to settle the matter with the October 1460 Act of Accord, which stated that although Richard's claim to the throne was stronger, Henry would remain king for his natural life. Henry and Margaret's 6-year-old son, Edward of Lancaster, would be disinherited, however, in favor of Richard, who would also regain the title of Lord Protector. Margaret and her son were ordered to leave both London and the king.

Enraged, Margaret headed back north into the Midlands, gathering Lancastrian supporters to her cause. As winter approached, Richard learned with alarm that she had massed a large army near the city of York, his ancestral seat. Richard and his brother-in-law, Salisbury, headed north to confront the Lancastrians. On December 30, 1460 the forces met at the Battle of Wakefield. Severely outnumbered, the Yorkists were driven from the field. Richard was killed in battle, and Margaret's troops captured both Salisbury and Richard's teenage son, Edmund of Rutland, whom the queen ordered beheaded. All three heads were placed over the gates of York to rot, as a mocking reminder of the Lancastrian victory, and a deadly insult to Richard's family and supporters.

Wakefield began a second, much bloodier and uglier phase of the wars. With Richard's death, leadership of the Yorkist cause passed to his oldest son, 18-year-old Edward, Earl of March. Tall, blond and handsome, Edward was naturally charismatic and, as it turned out, a born military leader. He and Warwick were now determined not only to achieve the Yorkists' political goals, but to exact bloody revenge for the deaths of their fathers. However, it took time for Edward and Warwick to raise armies to meet Margaret, and to join their forces, and the queen moved quickly to press her advantage.

Negotiating a marriage for her young son to the princess of Scotland, and promising the Scottish soldiers free reign to loot in southern England, Margaret was able to secure still more troops. However, because Margaret's cash-poor army depended on looting for its survival, it became increasingly feared and hated by the local populations as it passed south towards London. Although Warwick was unable to stop the Lancastrian advance in the field at a second Battle of St. Albans (having to retreat so quickly that their prize hostage, King Henry, was forgotten under a tree, and collected by his wife), he successfully spread propaganda that Margaret's army of "savage northerners" meant to pillage London. At the gates of the capital, Margaret and Henry's triumphant return was checked by the people of London, who barred the gates and refused to supply the Lancastrian army with food. Stalled at the threshold of their goal, the Lancastrians were reduced to looting the surrounding farms and estates for food.

Meanwhile, Edward and his younger brothers, George of Clarence and Richard of Gloucester (sons of the elder Richard of York), were moving east from Wales at the head of another Yorkist army, which the Lancastrians had been unable to stop. Joining forces with Warwick, the brothers moved swiftly towards London and Margaret's encampment. With the local countryside turning increasingly hostile, Margaret withdrew north to friendlier territory, and Edward was welcomed into London with celebrations and shouts of "King Edward!" Parliament met and hastily agreed that Edward should be crowned, although the young king stated that he would have no formal ceremony until Henry and Margaret were either executed or exiled.

A peaceful resolution was no longer possible, and both sides gathered all their remaining allies for a final showdown. Leaders on both sides agreed that the battle would be fought to the death. On March 29, 1461, the armies met on the moors of Towton, near York, in the midst of a late spring blizzard. By most estimates, the Lancastrians fielded at least 40,000 men, and the Yorkists more than 35,000. Well over half the hereditary nobility of England were armed and in the field. The ensuing battle was one of the bloodiest of the entire medieval era, and the largest single day's loss of life on English soil in recorded history. In the battle's opening minutes, volleys of over 120,000 arrows per minute rained down on each side, with the high winds and poor visibility wreaking havoc on those attempting to return fire from downwind. As the foot soldiers engaged one another, there were so many casualties that the two sides had to frequently halt to clear the bodies out of their way.

The balance of the battle shifted to and fro until late afternoon, when John Howard was able to arrive with several thousand fresh Yorkist troops. The Lancastrian lines collapsed, then panicked. Throwing their armor and weapons aside as they fled, they were easy targets for the Yorkists. Bridges collapsed under the weight of the fleeing men, who plunged into the flooded streams and rivers and drowned. Eventually, rivers were so choked with corpses that soldiers were climbing over bodies to cross. Edward and his brothers entered the city of York for the first time in years and replaced their father's rotting head with the freshly decapitated heads of numerous Lancastrian nobles. Historians estimate that 20,000 men lost their lives in the battle and the ensuing flight. Perhaps more than anything else, it is the horror of Towton that lived on in English cultural memory and that colors Shakespeare's descriptions of civil war.

Margaret, with her husband and son, narrowly escaped to Scotland, but the Lancastrian forces were shattered. A kind of guerilla warfare continued along the Scottish border and in Wales, but its principal result was the recapture of the deposed king in 1465, and his return to the Tower of London.

The third and final phase of the Wars began with the deterioration in the friendship between King Edward and his mentor Warwick. As much as Edward was admired as a soldier, he was notorious as a womanizer. One of these liaisons resulted in the king's secret marriage to a commoner, Elizabeth Woodville, in 1464. Warwick, who had been tirelessly negotiating Edward's marriage to a member of the French royal family, was humiliated and furious. By marrying Edward into the French court, he had hoped to trump Margaret's influence in France and crush any hope of a Lancastrian restoration once and for all. Now his plans were in ruins and the French more implacably opposed to the Yorkist regime than ever. To add insult to injury, Edward began granting offices and income to the new queen's large and ambitious family, as longtime Yorkist supporters went unnoticed. Finally, popular discontent was brewing, as taxes

and lawlessness were on the rise again.

Warwick decided that, as he had made Edward king, he could just as easily unmake him. Traveling to France, he was able to persuade his oldest enemy, Queen Margaret, to make peace with him and plot a return to power. As a sign of good faith, he betrothed his younger daughter, Anne, to Prince Edward of Lancaster. His older daughter, Isabel, was already married to King Edward's brother George of Clarence, and Warwick was able to persuade a disgruntled George to join the new alliance. Only King Edward's youngest brother, Richard of Gloucester (the future Richard III), refused to take part in Warwick's plot.

In 1470, the new Lancastrian army swept into England under Warwick's command. Joined by nobles dissatisfied with Edward and the Woodvilles, they were too numerous and swift for the king to counter. Edward and Richard fled to Holland, then to Burgundy, and Henry VI was released from the Tower and restored to his throne for the last time. Edward and Richard, in turn, were able to gain the support of the Duke of Burgundy, and their own armies invaded England in 1471. Two decisive victories destroyed the Lancastrians—Barnet, in which Warwick fell, and Tewkesbury, where Prince Edward of Lancaster was killed. A broken Queen Margaret fled again to France, never to return, Edward IV resumed the throne, and on May 14, 1471, Henry VI was put to death in the Tower to prevent any further Lancastrian uprisings.

Until 1483, Edward ruled in comparative peace. Under the surface, however, a fierce rivalry was brewing between his favored in-laws and a faction led by his brother Richard. In 1478, the king had his unreliable brother George executed for treason, and (in spite of Shakespeare) all historical evidence suggests that it was at the behest of the Woodvilles, and that Richard argued bitterly and faithfully for their feckless brother's life.

When Edward died, leaving his 12-year-old son Edward as the presumptive heir, Richard was not the only one alarmed at the degree of influence that the Woodvilles would hold over the boy king, and may have justifiably feared for his own life, given the fate of Clarence. In his will, King Edward had named his brother sole Protector until the prince came of age, but the Woodvilles moved immediately to have the will nullified. Richard was faster, and he capitalized on the nobility's growing detestation of the Woodville circle. Acting in Council and Parliament, he had Edward's marriage to Elizabeth Woodville declared invalid, and the young princes (Edward IV, Edward Prince of Wales and Richard, Duke of York, more on page 15) excluded from succession. Richard was crowned king, the leading members of the Woodvilles arrested and executed for treason, and the princes placed in royal custody in the Tower.

Many, but by no means all, of the English nobility who had survived the Wars thus far threw their support behind Richard, who was respected both as a general and administrator. Again, much of the scanty evidence that survives from Richard's short reign points to an able, reform-minded king. If anything, it was Richard's attempts at administrative reform and his leniency toward former opponents that contributed to his downfall. In 1485, Henry Tudor, Earl of Richmond, an illegitimate descendant of the House of Lancaster, led yet another army out of France to challenge the reigning king.

At the Battle of Bosworth Field, Richmond won the day by ensuring the desertion of forces on Richard's side. Richard was killed, and Henry Tudor was crowned King Henry VII, securing his claim to the

throne by marrying Edward IV's daughter Elizabeth, thus symbolically merging the red rose of Lancaster and the white rose of York.

The War of the Roses were finally at an end, although even Henry would face more than one uprising led by a Yorkist pretender during his reign. The true impact of the Wars is still debated by historians. On the one hand, the disruption to the lives and livelihoods of most ordinary people was relatively minimal. It was, to a great extent, a war fought by the highest echelon of the nobility and their households. Although the material consequences were not great, the psychological impact of the ongoing government instability, the regular presence of foreign fighters on English soil, and the extreme and gruesome brother-against-brother violence of battles such as Towton continued to be felt in Shakespeare's own day. Additionally, because the loss of life and money among the nobility was so great, the Wars practically ended the enormous power that the great noble families had held since 1066. With more than half their number dead, the nobility were unable to resist both Henry Tudor's ruthless efforts to centralize power in the monarchy and the growing insistence of the mercantile classes that they be heard in Parliament. The



A 19th century depiction of the Princes in the Tower by Sir John Everett Millais.

# The Mystery of the Princes in the Tower

Perhaps the most contentious “unsolved mystery” in the annals of history surrounds the disappearance of the sons of Edward IV; Edward, Prince of Wales and Richard, Duke of York. Although Shakespeare’s version of events, as narrated in *Richard III*, is quite clear that they were murdered on the orders of their nefarious uncle, King Richard III, the reality is far murkier.

When Edward IV died in 1483, his son Edward was a boy of 12, and would have been unable to rule in his own authority for several years. According to the terms of his father’s will, he was to be under the guidance of his uncle Richard of Gloucester, who would serve as Lord Protector until the boy came of age. Young Edward’s mother, Elizabeth Woodville, and her relatives could not accept the prospect of Richard, their implacable enemy, governing England, and they moved to break the will and to retain custody of the young king.

Edward IV, notorious as a womanizer, had numerous affairs before and after his marriage to Queen Elizabeth, and this provided the principal evidence that enabled Richard to break the Woodvilles’ hold on power. In a special session of Parliament, Richard presented evidence that King Edward had been betrothed prior to his secret marriage to Elizabeth, which, according to the law of the time, made him a bigamist and the princes illegitimate and thus unable to inherit the throne. Grateful for the opportunity to rid the nation of the Woodvilles, who were widely seen as opportunistic social climbers, the 1483 act of Parliament known as *Titulus Regius* declared the marriage null, the princes illegitimate, and Richard the rightful king of England.

Edward and his 10-year-old brother, Richard, were removed from their mother’s custody and placed in the Tower of London, which served as both a royal palace and a highly secure prison for the most elite prisoners. According to the few surviving reports of the events of the times, both boys were frequently seen playing in the yard of the Tower during the summer and fall of 1483. As of October 1483, however, they vanish from the pages of history. In the charged atmosphere of the Wars of the Roses, rumors began to spread within a matter of weeks, or at most months, that the boys were dead. But if so, how and when did they die?

Shakespeare’s version, and long the most popular version, holds that they were murdered in the Tower by order of their uncle King Richard in the fall of 1483 to secure his own claim to the throne. While compelling, there are a number of gaping holes in this theory. First, in 1483, Richard’s hold on the throne seemed relatively secure. With *Titulus Regius*, Parliament had indicated that the nation preferred Richard to the Woodvilles, and almost any adult monarch over the power vacuum created by a boy king. Another act of Parliament could have relegitimized the boys at a later date, but, if anything, the boys were far more dangerous to Richard as dead martyrs than as living nephews (as subsequent events were to demonstrate). Richard was also famous for his loyalty to his family, refusing to join Warwick in rebellion against Edward, pleading for the life of his treacherous brother George, and remaining his brother’s most dedicated and trusted advisor for years, even as he fumed at the king’s susceptibility to his Woodville in-laws. In appointing Richard guardian to his only son, Edward went entirely against the advice of those same Woodvilles, Richard’s most bitter enemies, suggesting that the king had the deepest trust in his brother. It seems strange that this Richard would have put his nephews to death without the most compelling of reasons.

In 1502, Sir James Tyrell confessed, under torture by the authorities of King Henry VII, that he had been ordered by King Richard in 1483 to kill the princes and dispose of their bodies. However, no modern court would accept a confession under torture, and even the Tudor sources who record the confession note that Tyrell was unable to say what had happened to the corpses.

In addition to Richard, a handful of other individuals have been identified as prime suspects in the princes’ deaths. Richard’s right-hand man, the Duke of Buckingham, became disgruntled and joined with Henry Tudor in an attempted rebellion against Richard late in 1483. Buckingham’s position gave him access to the Tower, and the presumed deaths of the princes (rumors of which began at roughly the same time as the Buckingham revolt) would have helped him stir up resentment against the king. Some speculate that the rift between Richard and Buckingham began because Buckingham exceeded his authority and went against Richard’s wishes in having the boys murdered. There is no hard evidence to support Buckingham’s guilt, but the simultaneous nature of the princes’ disappearance and his revolt seems oddly precise. Buckingham was executed for treason on November 2, 1483, and took any secrets he might have held with him to his grave.

Henry Tudor, the distant royal cousin who became Henry VII, had fairly strong motives for ensuring that the princes were dead. Even after defeating Richard at Bosworth Field, Henry faced several living claimants who could trace a clearer lineage to the throne than his own. Painting Richard as a monster who had killed two children in his quest for the throne, and himself as the nation’s liberator, clearly bolstered his chances in the court of public opinion. Better yet was the legal and symbolic value of marrying the princes’ sister, Elizabeth of York. The full impact of marrying Elizabeth could only be achieved if she was relegitimized, which Parliament did at Henry’s behest. However, in restoring Elizabeth’s legitimacy, the princes’ was restored as well, meaning that Henry’s claim to the throne was void unless both boys were certainly dead. Henry, even in his supporters’ accounts, was a cold, shrewd and ruthless man who was relentless in destroying his political opponents. If the princes indeed survived, unseen by the public, until his accession in 1485, he had every reason to ensure that they were quickly and quietly disposed of, as he eventually disposed of George of Clarence’s young son.

Could the princes have survived until 1485, or even beyond? If Richard did not kill his nephews, he had every reason to place them in a secure location where they could not easily be used as pawns in a rebellion against him. The Tyrell family maintained for years that Queen Elizabeth and her sons had been placed in their household for safekeeping, far from London politics, sometime between 1483–85. From there, tantalizing hints exist that the boys may have been smuggled out of the country ahead of Richmond’s invasion, just as King Richard himself had taken refuge in Europe as a teenager. Did at least one of the boys survive to adulthood, possibly in the court of their aunt, Margaret of Burgundy? Was the pretender Perkin Warbeck, acknowledged as Prince Richard by Margaret herself and half the crowned heads of Europe, really the same person as the 10-year-old boy who had been sent to the Tower in 1483?

There are no clear answers to the story of the princes, and their mystery will most likely continue to be fiercely debated for all time.

## Additional Topics for Discussion

### About the Play

1. In some editions, this play was entitled *The Tragedy of Richard III*; in others, *The Life and Death of Richard III*. Could this play be considered a tragedy? Does Richard, like Macbeth, come to a more profound realization about his life and his actions, or is he merely a sadistic villain? Cite evidence from the text.

2. As portrayed by Shakespeare, Richard seems to be a malevolent, cruel and unfeeling scoundrel who will stop at nothing (and kill anyone) to ensure his possession of the crown. His physical deformities, Shakespeare implies, are a metaphor for the twisted nature of his mind. Yet Shakespeare's Richard also seems to be a brilliant and charismatic user of language, able to woo a woman over the corpse of a man that he himself has murdered. How and why does Shakespeare reconcile these facts about Richard?

3. In Act I, scene iv, Richard's imprisoned brother George of Clarence awakes from a strange nightmare and describes it at length to his jailer. Here, as in other Shakespeare plays, a dream is used as an omen of things to come. Yet we already know that Richard intends to kill Clarence. Why does Shakespeare describe the dream with such detail and poetry? Compare it to other prophetic dreams, such as Calpurnia's dream in Act II, scene ii of *Julius Caesar*. Why is Shakespeare so interested in dreams?

4. *Richard III* features more women in speaking roles than most of Shakespeare's plays, and more than any other history play. Why do female voices play such an important part in this play? How do the major female characters (Queen Margaret, Queen Elizabeth, Lady Anne and the Duchess of York) function in the play?

5. Richard often speaks to the audience in soliloquy. Ian McKellen has said that "Richard may lie to all the other characters but within his solo speeches he always tells the truth." Do you agree with McKellen's assessment? If so, why does Shakespeare have Richard treat the audience as his confidantes? Do these soliloquies change your perception of Richard and, if so, how?

### About this Production

1. The visual world of this production reflects no one specific time and place. Elements of it may seem almost futuristic to you, yet other elements are drawn from the styles of the 1930s. Why might the director and designers have chosen this period for inspiration? How does the history of the 1930s relate to the history of 1480s as depicted in Shakespeare's play?

2. Some of the dominant scenic features in this production are the "rakes," or sloped surfaces, and the "trap" into which many of the play's corpses are thrown. What did these signify to you?

3. Every production faces a decision about how to depict the deformities with which Shakespeare endows Richard. In some cases, directors have made them quite grotesque; in others, they seem barely noticeable, more a matter of perception than reality. How would you characterize Richard's physical appearance in this production?

## Follow-up Activities

1. Write a review of this production of *Richard III*. Be sure to include specific information and your own reactions to both the acting and the design elements (lights, set, costumes and sound). Explain what you liked about the production, and what you disliked, and support your opinions. Then submit your review to The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey's Education Department, or see if it can be published in your school newspaper.

2. "**Alert the media!**" Shakespeare depicts Richard III as a master of "spin," able to act in one way and appear to the public in an entirely different way. Select a series of events from the play, and "cover" them in the style of a newspaper or television journalist: obituaries for any one of the numerous deaths, courtroom coverage of one of the offstage treason trials, a battlefield report from Bosworth Field, etc. Your coverage may be truly objective, or it may be pure propaganda for either Richard or his opponent Richmond.

3. "**I learn by this letter...**" Write a letter from the point of view of one of the characters, discussing an event or situation in the play. For example, a letter from Queen Elizabeth to her family about her fears regarding her sons, or a letter from Lady Anne to a friend about her decision to marry Richard.

4. **Mock trial.** Research the real historical evidence for and against Richard's murder of his nephews, then stage a trial in your classroom. There are numerous books and articles laying out the evidence on either side, some of which are listed later in this study guide.

5. Divide into five groups, and have each group take one act of the play. Your task is to create a three-minute version of your act, using only Shakespeare's words. Choose carefully the lines from your act that carry the most important information and advance the story. When each group is done, you will have a 15-minute version of *Richard III* which you can perform for one another. Afterwards, discuss both the process of adaptation and how your "abridgement" compared to the full-length performance.

6. Imagine that Richard has hired you to create a public relations campaign designed to persuade the citizens of England that he is the best choice for king. Your campaign may include: a symbol or icon (thinking about existing political symbols in the real world), a propaganda broadcast (audio or video), a song or anthem, a monument, or any other persuasive ideas you come up with. Present the elements of your campaign to your fellow students.

7. "**History is written by the victors.**" What if Richard had won at Bosworth Field (as he nearly did) and Richmond and the Woodvilles had gone down in history as the villains? How would Shakespeare's play have been different? Write a narrative account or synopsis of Richard's story, from a pro-Richard point of view.

*Teachers:*

*Do you have activities or exercises to suggest for this play? We are always looking for new ideas to inspire students (and teachers). Send your suggestions to [info@ShakespeareNJ.org](mailto:info@ShakespeareNJ.org) and we will share them with other teachers, and maybe even include them in future study guides.*



**Test Your Understanding**

1. Shakespeare's plays are most often written in:  
a) rhyming couplets  
b) Old English  
c) blank verse  
d) prose
2. Shakespeare wrote in what language?  
a) Old English  
b) early modern English  
c) Middle English  
d) Latin
3. Which of the following women is Richard III's mother?  
a) Queen Margaret  
b) Queen Elizabeth  
c) Lady Anne  
d) The Duchess of York
4. In the play, who is Richard's first victim in his quest for the throne?  
a) Clarence  
b) Prince Edward  
c) Hastings  
d) King Henry VI
5. Complete the quote: "Now is the \_\_\_\_\_ of our discontent."  
a) morning  
b) hour  
c) rising  
d) winter
6. The king at the beginning of the play, Edward IV, is who in relation to Richard?  
a) his father  
b) his uncle  
c) his brother  
d) his illegitimate half-brother
7. How does Richard III die?  
a) He is executed for treason  
b) He is killed in battle  
c) He is poisoned by his wife  
d) He is murdered by his nephew
8. Who replaces Richard as king?  
a) Richmond  
b) Derby  
c) Buckingham  
d) Edward V
9. Who promotes Richard's claim to the throne to the Mayor and citizens of London?  
a) Lady Anne  
b) Tyrrel  
c) Buckingham  
d) King Edward
10. Who is put in charge of the murder of the two young princes?  
a) Richmond  
b) Dorset  
c) Buckingham  
d) Tyrrel
11. Clarence's real name is:  
a) George Plantagenet  
b) George Woodville  
c) Richard Rivers  
d) William Clarence
12. Where does the final battle take place?  
a) Coventry  
b) Normandy  
c) Stanley  
d) Bosworth
13. Richard's emblem is the:  
a) Hedgehog  
b) Boar  
c) Red Rose  
d) Spider
14. Buckingham turns against Richard because:  
a) Richard has his wife killed  
b) Richmond bribes him  
c) A prophecy warns him to "beware the bloody boar"  
d) Richard refuses to grant him an earldom
15. How does Clarence die?  
a) He is stabbed in his sleep  
b) He is smothered with a pillow  
c) He is drowned in a barrel of wine  
d) He is thrown from the Tower of London

## What Did He Say?

This is an opportunity to test your comprehension of Shakespeare’s language. Below you will find passages from *Richard III*. Answer the questions for each passage as specifically as possible.

RICHARD

Was ever woman in this humour wooed?  
 Was ever woman in this humour won?  
 I’ll have her; but I will not keep her long.  
 What! I, that killed 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!

1. Richard is alone on stage. What information is he conveying to the audience? Who is the “woman” he refers to?
2. What does Richard mean by “humour?”
3. Who is “the bleeding witness of her hatred?”
4. What does Richard mean by “the plain devil and dissembling looks?”
5. What does this speech reveal about Richard’s motives?

QUEEN MARGARET

I called thee then poor shadow, painted queen;  
 The presentation of but what I was;  
 The flattering index of a direful pageant;  
 One heaved a-high, to be hurled down below;  
 A mother only mocked with two sweet babes;  
 A dream of what thou wert, a breath, a bubble,  
 A sign of dignity, a garish flag,  
 To be the aim of every dangerous shot,  
 A queen in jest, only to fill the scene.

1. Who is the “painted queen” that Margaret speaks to?
2. What does she mean by “only mocked with two sweet babes?”
3. The line “One heaved a-high, to be hurled down below,” is an *antithesis*, a figure of speech contrasting unlike things. What does Margaret mean by this antithesis?
4. Why does Margaret compare her listener to “a garish flag?”
5. Margaret asserts that she is similar to the woman she addresses. Why does she say so, and what is her purpose in saying this?

## Who Said That?

Match the spoken line to the character who speaks it. Two characters have two quotes each. Three characters have none of the quotes listed below.

- |    |   |                                     |
|----|---|-------------------------------------|
| A. | “A horse, a horse! My kingdom for a horse!”   | RICHARD OF GLOUCESTER (RICHARD III) |
| B. | “Arise, dissembler. Though I wish thy death,<br>I would not be thy executioner.”  | BUCKINGHAM                          |
| C. | “Come lead me, officers, to the block of shame.<br>Wrong hath but wrong, and blame the due of blame.”                                     | LADY ANNE                           |
| D. | “I’ll win our ancient right in France again<br>Or die a soldier as I lived a king.”   | KING EDWARD IV                      |
| E. | “Thou cam’st on earth to make the earth my hell.<br>A grievous burden was thy birth to me.”   | QUEEN ELIZABETH                     |
| F. | “Welcome destruction, blood, and massacre!<br>I see, as in a map, the end of all.”  | EDWARD, PRINCE OF WALES             |
| G. | “Welcome destruction, blood, and massacre!<br>I see, as in a map, the end of all.”  | DUCHESS OF YORK                     |
| H. | “Come thou on my side and entreat for me.<br>A begging prince what beggar pities not?”  | CLARENCE                            |
| I. | “Was ever woman in this humour wooed?”  | QUEEN MARGARET                      |
| J. | “O, Buckingham, take heed of yonder dog!<br>Look when he fawns he bites; and when he bites,<br>His venom tooth will rankle to the death.” | RICHMOND                            |
| K. | “The day is ours; the bloody dog is dead.”  | HASTINGS                            |
|    | “Bear with me! I am hungry for revenge,<br>And now I cloy with beholding it.”   | SIR JAMES TYRREL                    |

## Meeting NJ Core Curriculum Standards

With New Jersey’s implementation of the Core Curriculum Content Standards, teachers and administrators are seeking programs and materials that will help achieve these new classroom requirements. By merely viewing a performance at The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey and participating in the post-performance discussion, students can meet many Curriculum Standards. The activities included in this study guide, when implemented in the classroom, as well as teacher assigned writing assignments will allow students to meet additional Curriculum Standards.

### VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS STANDARDS

The Visual and Performing Arts Standards require students to experience, perform and comment on various forms of fine art. A *Student Matinee Series* performance, and incorporation of the enclosed study guide exercises, will help meet the following Curriculum Standards.

**STANDARD 1.1:** All students will use aesthetic knowledge in the creation of and in responses to dance, music, theatre and visual arts.

**STANDARD 1.2:** All students will utilize those skills, media, methods, and technologies appropriate to each of art form in the creation, performance, and presentation of dance, music, theatre and/or visual arts.

**STANDARD 1.4:** All students will develop, apply and reflect upon knowledge of the process of critique.

**STANDARD 1.5:** All students will understand and analyze the role, development, and continuing influence of the arts in relation to world cultures, history, and society.

### LANGUAGE ARTS LITERACY STANDARDS

Active listening and responding to what has been presented are two major aspects of the Language Arts Literacy Standard. A performance at The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey can be used as a springboard for classes to help students meet the following Standards.

**STANDARD 3.2:** All students will listen actively in a variety of situations to information from a variety of sources.

**STANDARD 3.3:** All students will write in clear, concise, organized language that varies in content and form for different audiences and purposes.

### SOCIAL STUDIES STANDARDS

Gaining an awareness and understanding of various cultures and cultural influences throughout history is part of the root of the Social Studies Standards. A *Student Matinee* performance can, once again, be used as a springboard into activities that will help meet the following Standard.

**STANDARD 6.2:** All students will learn democratic citizenship through the humanities, by studying literature, art, history and philosophy, and related fields.

### Artwork Credits:

p3: Photo of the F.M. Kirby Shakespeare Theatre, the Main Stage venue of The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey, 1998.

p5: Engraving of William Shakespeare by Droeshout from the First Folio, 1623.

p9: 16th century portrait of King Richard III. Artist unknown. National Portrait Gallery, London.

p14: *The Two Princes Edward and Richard in the Tower* (1878), Sir John Everett Millais. The Picture Gallery of Royal Holloway College, London.

### Sources for this study guide:

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THE FRIENDLY SHAKESPEARE by Norrie Epstein

THE MIRACLE OF LANGUAGE by Richard Lederer

SHAKESPEARE A TO Z by Charles Boyce

SHAKESPEARE’S KINGS by John Julius Norwich

SHAKESPEARE FOR BEGINNERS by Brandon Toropov

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ORB, the Online Reference Book for Medieval Studies ([www.the-orb.net](http://www.the-orb.net))

The Signet Classic teacher’s guide for *Richard III* ([us.penguin.com](http://us.penguin.com))

### Test Your Understanding Answer Key

1. c      2. b      3. d      4. a      5. d      6. c

7. b      8. a      9. c      10. d      11. a      12. d

13. b      14. d      15. c

### Who Said That? Answer Key

A. Richard III

B. Lady Anne

C. Buckingham

D. Edward, Prince of Wales

E. Duchess of York

F. Queen Elizabeth

G. Clarence

H. Richard III

I. Queen Margaret

J. Richmond

K. Queen Margaret

## About The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey

The acclaimed Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey (formerly called “New Jersey Shakespeare Festival”) is one of the leading Shakespeare theatres in the nation. Serving nearly 100,000 adults and children annually, it is New Jersey’s only professional theatre company dedicated to Shakespeare’s canon and other classic masterworks. Through its distinguished productions and education programs, the company strives to illuminate the universal and lasting relevance of the classics for contemporary audiences. The longest-running Shakespeare theatre on the east coast, The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey marks its 44th season in 2006.

In addition to producing and presenting classic theatre, the Theatre’s mission places an equal focus on education— both for young artists and audiences of all ages. The Theatre nurtures emerging new talent for the American stage and cultivates future audiences by providing extensive student outreach opportunities. Through our work, we endeavor to promote literacy, civilization, community, cultural awareness, the theatrical tradition, and a more enlightened view of the world in which we live and the people with whom we share it.

The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey is one of 20 professional theatres in the state of New Jersey. The company’s dedication to the classics and commitment to excellence sets critical standards for the field. Nationwide, the Theatre has emerged as one of the most exciting “new” theatres under the leadership of Artistic Director, Bonnie J. Monte since 1990. It is one of only a handful of Shakespeare Theatres on the east coast, and in recent years has drawn larger and larger audiences and unprecedented critical acclaim. The opening of the intimate, 308-seat F.M. Kirby Shakespeare Theatre in 1998, provided the Theatre with a state-of-the-art venue with excellent sightlines, and increased access for patrons and artists with disabilities.

The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey is a member of ArtPride, The Shakespeare Theatre Association of America, Theatre Communications Group, and is a founding member of the New Jersey Theatre Alliance.

## Other Opportunities for Students... and Teachers

### **SHAKESPEARE LIVE! EDUCATIONAL TOURING COMPANY**

*Shakespeare LIVE!* is the educational touring company of The Shakespeare Theatre. This dynamic troupe of actors brings exceptional abridged productions of Shakespeare’s masterworks directly into the classroom. Workshops are also available in Stage Combat and Shakespeare in Performance.

### **JUNIOR AND SENIOR CORPS**

Young actors are given the opportunity to participate in the excitement of the Theatre’s summer season through this program, which offers classes, a final presentation, as well as behind-the-scenes and front-of-house experience. Geared for students in grades 6 through 12, admission to this program is through audition and/or interview.

### **SUMMER PROFESSIONAL TRAINING PROGRAM**

For graduating high school seniors and for university students, the intensive Summer Professional Training Program offers acting apprenticeships and professional internships, providing academic training and hands-on experience in acting, technical, artistic and arts management areas. For a full brochure of the opportunities available, please contact the Education Department.

### **SHAKEFEST: SUMMER SHAKESPEARE INSTITUTE FOR TEACHERS**

Designed for elementary and secondary teachers of Shakespeare, *ShakeFest* is an weeklong intensive filled with myriad practical ways to conquer “ShakesFear” and excite students about the Bard. In hands-on sessions, experienced teaching artists model active and exciting performance-oriented techniques to get students on their feet and “speaking the speech.”

For more information about these and other educational programs  
at The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey,  
log onto our website,  
**[www.ShakespeareNJ.org](http://www.ShakespeareNJ.org)**  
or call **(973) 408-3278**