



Henry VIII

by
William Shakespeare

Audience Guide

researched and written by
the Education Department of
The Shakespeare Theatre
of New Jersey



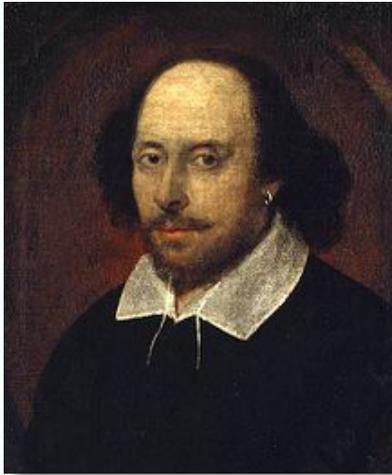


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The Life Of William Shakespeare



National Portrait Gallery, London

William Shakespeare, widely 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 approximately 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 the plays were well-liked, Shakespeare's work was 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.



The Shakespeare Family
Coat of Arms

Henry VIII

A Synopsis

Please note: Below is a full summary of the play. If you prefer not to spoil the plot, consider skipping this section.

A prologue cautions that this is not a happy tale for nobles whose “mightiness meets misery.” One such noble, Buckingham, learning of Henry’s extravagant meeting with the French monarch, complains of Cardinal Wolsey’s sway over the King. He denounces Wolsey as “corrupt and treasonous” and promises to accuse the Cardinal before Henry. Norfolk cautions Buckingham against challenging Wolsey’s power, but it is too late: Buckingham is arrested and sent to the Tower of London.

As Henry prepares to receive Buckingham’s confession, he is confronted by Queen Katherine, who is unsettled by rising complaints resulting from new taxes imposed by Wolsey on the people. The King knows of no such taxation, and the Cardinal denies responsibility. When Henry orders Wolsey to cancel the tax,

the Cardinal obeys, but then takes credit for the repeal in order to gain favor among the commoners. Katherine voices her suspicions regarding charges against Buckingham, but Henry still orders a trial.

At York Place, Cardinal Wolsey hosts a masked ball. Among the guests is one of the Queen’s ladies-in-waiting, Anne Bullen. Henry arrives in disguise and invites Anne to dance. Even in this short exchange, it is clear that he has taken a particular liking to her.

Being found guilty of treason on the testimony of his surveyor, Buckingham speaks movingly and warns against being too liberal with one’s trust, before being taken away to his execution.

Meanwhile, rumors spread that the King has separated from Katherine; Henry believes he cannot in good conscience remain married to his brother’s widow, an issue he claims explains why Katherine has not been able to produce a male heir. Wolsey would have him marry the French king’s sister, but Henry has a different idea and gives Anne Bullen the title of Marchioness of Pembroke.

Back at court, Katherine pleads her case before the King, insisting that she has always been a faithful and loving wife to Henry. She also claims that Wolsey has laced the King’s mind with misconceptions about her and, in part, helped to orchestrate her demise. After Katherine departs, Henry praises her nobility but

What’s in a Name?

In Shakespeare’s day, spelling was much less formalized, often relying more on sounds than letters. Shakespeare’s script uses the spelling of “Bullen” in place of the proper spelling of “Boleyn”, and “Katherine” in place of “Catherine.” We have chosen to maintain Shakespeare’s spellings where appropriate in this guide.



again justifies his reasons for divorcing her. Frustrated by the Pope's lack of reply regarding his divorce, Henry recalls his former advisor Thomas Cranmer, who was exiled by Wolsey.

Plunged into gloom, Katherine (no longer Queen) is visited by Wolsey who advises her to surrender to the King's protection. She rebukes him and accepts her fate.

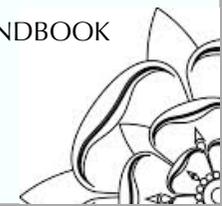
In the palace, Suffolk recounts that the King has intercepted a letter from Wolsey urging the Pope to withhold approval of the divorce, and it is discovered that the King has already married the young Anne Bullen. Henry arrives, confronts Wolsey, and questions him about the Cardinal's loyalty to the crown. Wolsey claims to be forever faithful, and Henry plays along with the lie, but as he leaves, he gives Wolsey the Cardinal's incriminating letter. Realizing he has fallen out of the King's favor, Wolsey is informed that he must forfeit all of his lands and possessions to the crown and leave the Kingdom. Sir Thomas More replaces Wolsey as Lord Chancellor, and Thomas Cranmer (a favorite former advisor to the King) is named the new Archbishop of Canterbury.

Anne Bullen's extravagant coronation takes place as Katherine lies ailing. When Katherine hears of Wolsey's demise, she criticizes his maliciousness toward her, but she cannot help but feel some pity for the broken man. Katherine has a strange dream in which she is visited by "spirits of peace," and she seems prepared for death. She sends a word to the King asking him to care for their daughter Mary and her servants. After imparting this information, Katherine leaves soon to seek her final resting place.

Gardiner, the Archbishop of Winchester (an appointee from Wolsey to the King), expresses his great hatred for Cromwell and Cranmer, who are in high favor with the King. He plans to bring accusations against Cranmer, painting him as disloyal to the crown. When the King arrives and hears of the accusations against Cranmer, he confronts the Cranmer and finds him faithful and devoted to God and crown. Henry warns him of the accusations against him from powerful members of the court, and then encourages him to remain steadfast, handing him his seal (on a ring) to signify his favor of Cranmer and signifying his protection as well. A lady of the court rushes in and announces that Anne has given birth to a daughter.

Presented before the King's small counsel, Cranmer hears the specific charges against him and is informed that he is to be sent to the Tower. As guards prepare to lead him away, Cranmer displays the King's ring and the lords realize they have overstepped their authority. Henry arrives and chastises the counsel, ordering them to make peace with Cranmer, which they all do. The King then invites Cranmer to baptize his daughter and serve as her godfather. The King and all the lords gather for Princess Elizabeth's baptism. Cranmer prophesies that Elizabeth will be a powerful and beloved Queen but will die a virgin, without an heir to her crown.

Synopsis adapted from THE ESSENTIAL SHAKESPEARE HANDBOOK



Henry VIII

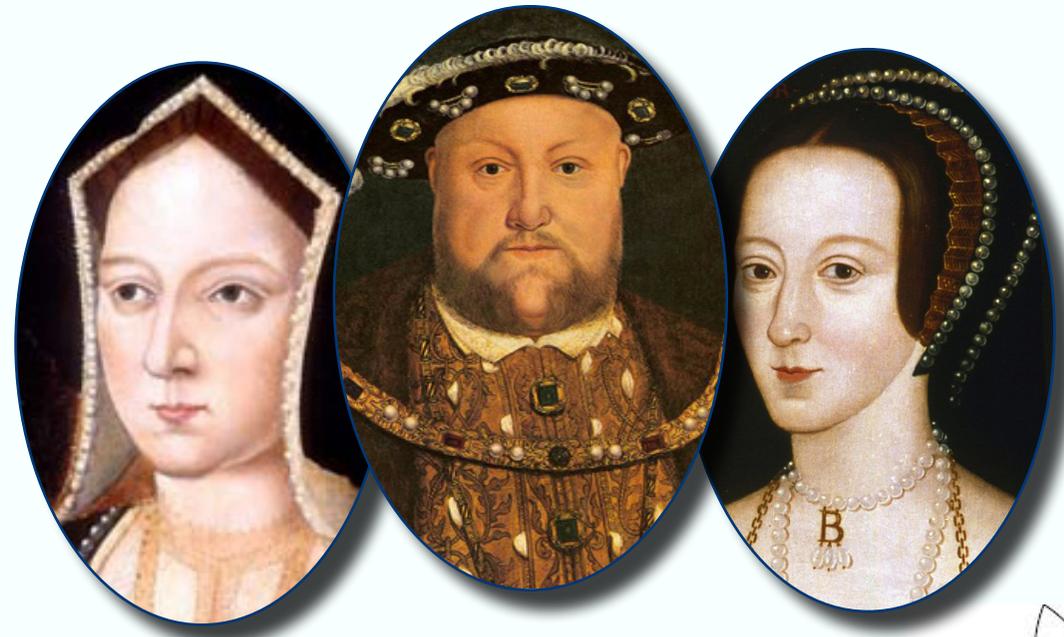
A Brief History of the Play

Henry VIII is a play full of pageantry and, during the height of its popularity, was presented on an almost operatic scale. Many of the scenes call for a hoard of people to fill the courts, crowded streets, Wolsey's masquerade ball; there is even a scene that requires a flight of "dancing spirits of peace" to appear before Katherine in a dream. Many 19th century directors embraced these challenges, but modern directors opt to focus on the compelling characters and dramatic action over the pageantry and aim for more modest approaches in production.

It is speculated that the play was first performed as part of wedding festivities for Princess Elizabeth (daughter to King James I) on Valentine's Day in 1613. The first *recorded* performance was a notorious one on June 29th, 1613. In that production, a cannon was fired to announce the entrance of Henry to Wolsey's masked ball, a common practice at the time. Unfortunately, a spark from that cannon ignited the thatched roof of The Globe and burned the entire theatre to the ground in two hours. Fortunately, there were no casualties. Fifteen years later, to the day, The Kings Men performed the piece once again.

The play saw frequent productions in the 17th and 18th centuries, many of which embraced the pageantry suggested in the script with enormous casts, complex dances, and even live animals on stage. Notable performances include a Restoration era performance in 1664, staged by Sir William Davenant, and frequent revivals by Colley Cibber in the 1720s. The play's popularity waned in the 20th century and it has been presented infrequently since then.

The longest run on Broadway (63 performances) occurred in 1916 and was directed by Herbert Beerbolm Tree who also starred as Cardinal Wolsey. Margaret Webster famously revived the play as the inaugural production at the new American Repertory Theatre in 1946. *Henry VIII* was also presented as part of the reconstructed Shakespeare's Globe season of history plays in 2010.



Portraits of Henry VIII (Top), Catherine of Aragon (Left) and Anne Boleyn (Right)

All in the Family

The Rulers

The Wives

Catherine of Aragon - Married 1509—1533

She was originally betrothed and married to Henry's older brother, Arthur in an attempt to unite England and Spain. After Arthur's death, Henry had her previous marriage annulled and wed her himself. They divorced in 1533. Their only child, Mary, would eventually become queen.

Anne Boleyn - Married 1533—1536

The daughter of a courier and diplomat, Anne was a lady-in-waiting to Catherine, before Anne was married to Henry. Their marriage ended when he had her arrested for adultery and witchcraft and later beheaded. She was the first Queen to be publically executed. Their daughter, Elizabeth, went on to reign for more than four decades.

Jane Seymour - Married 1536—1537

A former Lady-in-waiting to both Catherine and Anne, she and Henry were betrothed within 24 hours of Anne's execution. Dying only two weeks after giving birth to their son, Edward. Jane is the only one of Henry's wives to be interred with him.

Anne of Cleves - Married 1540

Though he had only seen her in a portrait, in an attempt to ally himself with Germany, Henry married Anne of Cleves. The portrait may have been misleading, as he was rumored to have called her his "Flanders Mare," and their wedding was amicably annulled after only six months.

Kathryn Howard - Married 1540—1542

Anne Boleyn's first cousin, Kathryn was also a lady-in-waiting to Anne of Cleves. Sixteen days after his annulment from Anne, he married Kathryn who was 30 years his junior. She was arrested for adultery and executed.

Katherine Parr - Married 1545—1547

A daughter of one of Catherine's ladies-in-waiting, she was named after Henry's first wife. She was close with his children, and involved in the education of both Edward and Elizabeth. Though denied regency, she took Elizabeth (and Jane Grey) as wards until her death in 1548.

Henry VIII (1491-1547) - Reigned 1509—1547

Henry's split with the Catholic Church led to the establishment of the Church of England. He was married six times.

Edward VI (1537—1553) Reigned 1547—1553

Ten years old when his father passed, his Uncle Edward Seymour was named Lord Protector until young Edward came of age. While Edward was a Protestant, there was fear that if he died, Mary would take control and return the country to Catholicism. He died of a sickness (presumably tuberculosis) at the age of 15.

Lady Jane Grey (1537—1553) Reigned 1553

A cousin of Mary I, Jane was named heir by Edward VI in an attempt by the Lord Protector to keep a Catholic off of the English throne. Jane was named Queen on July 10, 1553 and deposed on July 19, 1553. The "9-day-queen" and her husband were executed in 1554 after her family attempted a second uprising against Mary I.

Mary I (1516—1558) Reigned 1553—1558

The King's eldest, and only surviving issue from his marriage to Catherine of Aragon. Following the 9-day reign of her cousin Jane Grey, Mary ascended the throne and her first act of power was to restore the marriage of her late parents. She married Philip II of Spain, and earned the nickname "Bloody Mary" for burning more than 275 Protestants in an attempt to restore Catholicism to England. She died in 1558 without an heir.

Elizabeth I (1533—1603) Reigned 1558—1603

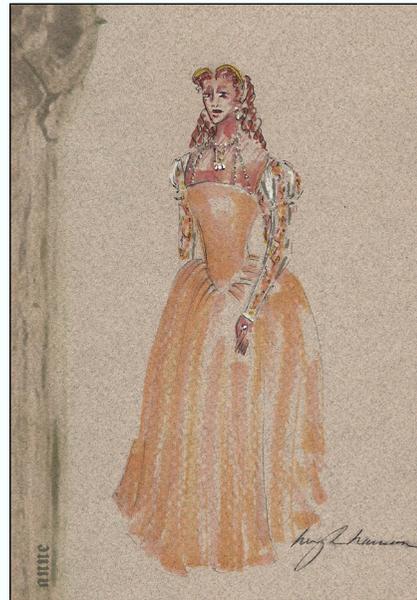
The only surviving child from Henry's marriage to Anne Bullen, Elizabeth succeeded her half-sister, Mary, despite numerous attempts to have her removed from the line of succession. Her reign, often referred to as "The Golden Age" was one of the most storied in England's history. The last ruler of the Tudor Dynasty, she died in 1603 without an heir and was succeeded by James I.

Who's Who in Henry VIII

King Henry VIII: An autocratic monarch who breaks with Rome when the Pope refuses to approve his divorce from Katherine of Aragon; he ousts Cardinal Wolsey as Lord Chancellor, paving the way for his marriage to Anne Bullen

Queen Katherine: Widow to the King's elder brother, Arthur, Katherine was married to Henry for more than two decades before he sought to divorce her; she courageously attacks Wolsey and retains her dignity even as she is discarded.

Cardinal Wolsey: The all-powerful Lord Chancellor; he justifies the King's divorce from Katherine, but foolishly tries to block Henry's marriage to Anne Bullen, a move that leads to his downfall



- Anne Bullen:** A lady-in-waiting to Katherine; she catches the King's eye and is chosen as his new queen
- Duke of Norfolk:** A powerful noble; presides over Buckingham's trial
- Duke of Suffolk:** A powerful noble and a fierce opponent of Wolsey
- Duke of Buckingham:** A nobleman whose father was executed by Richard III; he tries to undermine Wolsey's power and is executed for treason
- Lord Chamberlain:** A senior official, he presides at the King's court
- Sir Thomas Lovell:** An influential knight
- Cardinal Campeius:** A Papal envoy sent to support Wolsey
- Lord Chancellor:** Sir Thomas More; he replaces Wolsey as senior legal officer in the land
- Gardiner:** An appointee to the King from Wolsey, later Bishop of Winchester; a devout Catholic who attempts to have Cranmer sent to the Tower of London
- Thomas Cromwell:** A close aide to Wolsey; switches allegiance to Henry after Wolsey's downfall
- Thomas Cranmer:** A former trusted advisor to Henry, banished by Wolsey; when recalled by the King, named Archbishop of Canterbury and approves Henry's divorce from Katherine
- Knevet, a Surveyor:** Former manager of Buckingham's estate; later betrays Buckingham and testifies against him
- A Lady:** A lady-in-waiting who mocks Anne Bullen's claim to have no ambition to be queen
- Patience:** Katherine's lady-in-waiting
- Griffith:** Attendant to Katherine

Hugh Hanson's costume designs for Cardinal Wolsey and Anne Bullen for the 2014 production of *Henry VIII* at The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey.



Glossary

of Words and Phrases

Act 1

shilling – English coin, 1/20th of a pound
guarded with yellow – trimmed in yellow
ague – fever, sickness shaking
cliquant – glittering with gold or silver, gleaming, sparkling
keech – lump of congealed fat
cur – a dog
choler – anger
commonalty – the common people
surveyor – superintendent, land agent, estate supervisor
he is attach'd – he is arrested
plainsong – a simple, straightforward melody
Viscount – title of nobility, next in rank to an Earl
Chamberlain – the officer charged with the direction and management of the private apartments of the king

Act II

fain – gladly, willingly
pang that pinches – the pain that afflicts
avaunt – order to be gone, farewell
troth – true oath
maidenhead – virginity
cheveril – flexible, yielding, pliant
vouchsafe – allow, permit, grant
Marchioness – a woman having the rank of a marquess
scruple – a tiny amount
throe – an extreme pain, often related to labor
dilatory – full of delays

Act III

Tanta est erga te mentis integritas Regina serenissima (Latin)
 – “So great is my integrity of mind toward you, most serene queen”
conjunction – a union or connection
whet – to excite, to stimulate or to agitate
yoke – to link or join
meridian of my glory – the highest point of my glory
succor – aid
legatine – as a papal representative
tenements – land held by a tenant
chattels – moveable possessions

Act IV

burthen – a load
Abbot – the governor of a monastery
durst – to have the courage, be bold enough; dare
unbounded stomach – limitless pride
beseeking – begging, entreating

Act V

whither – where
primero – a type of gambling card game
travail – labour, pain of childbirth
winnow'd – separated the chaff from the grain
chaff – husks of corn and wheat
calumnious – slanderous, defamatory, disparaging
knaves – fools
vehemency – forcefulness, fervor
physic – cure
purgation – cleansing, clearing away

Henry VIII

Director's Notes

Henry VIII — All is True

"If people know anything at all about *Henry VIII* [the play] they are most likely to know that it caused the destruction of the Globe Theatre, or that it has been the source of arguments over Shakespearean authorship more than they are likely to have a close acquaintance with the actual text. But this would not have been the case a century ago, at the height of *Henry VIII*'s popularity on the stage. It strikes me as a great pity that the play should be so underappreciated now, because (and I may as well state this right away) I think it a splendid play and one that richly rewards close attention."

—Gordon McMullan, Lecturer, Department of English,
Kings College, London.
King Henry VIII (All Is True), The Arden Shakespeare

Sir Henry Wotton, a spectator at the first recorded performance of *Henry VIII*, then known as *All Is True*, said:

"... I will entertain you at the present with what happened this week at the Banks side. The King's players had a new play called *All is True*, representing some principal pieces of the reign of Henry the Eighth, which set forth with many extraordinary circumstances of pomp and majesty: sufficient in truth within awhile to make greatness very familiar, if not ridiculous. Now King Henry making a Masque at the Cardinal Wolsey's house, and certain cannons being shot off at his entry, some of the paper or other stuff, wherewith one of them was stopped, did light on the thatch, where being thought at first but idle smook, and their eyes more attentive to the show, it

kindled inwardly, and ran round like a train, consuming within less than an hour the whole house to the very ground. This was the fatal period of that virtuous fabrick, wherein yet nothing did perish but wood and straw, and a few forsaken cloaks; only one man had his breeches set on fire, that would perhaps have broyled him, if he had not by the benefit of a provident wit, put it out with a bottle of ale." It was not until the publication in the First Folio in 1623 that this play was referred to as *Henry VIII*.

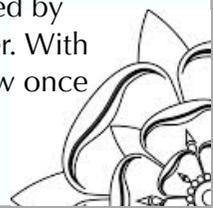
—*The Life and Letters of Sir Henry Wotton*, ed. Logan Pearsall Smith (Oxford, 1907)

"The play is filled with stories of positions won and lost, with rumors, with intrigues, with factions forming and breaking, with attempts to secure that which can never be truly secured— that is, favor. Behind all of the play's reminders of Fortune and of the guiding hand of Providence, we are repeatedly faced with the realities of life in a world where gold buys subversion and false witness, and where treachery and self-serving are the rule. In this world, one survives through constant vigilance— with an eye on the person above on the ladder and an eye on the person below. Both are equally dangerous."

—Barbara A. Mowat
Henry VIII: A Modern Perspective

How The Tudor's Came to Power

For over thirty years, England was engaged in civil war between the royal houses of Lancaster and York. This became known as The War of the Roses. The house of York reigned supreme with the rise of King Edward IV. However, after his death, the claim to the English throne would be fought for once again. The Throne was then usurped by the infamous spider Richard III, Edward IV's youngest brother. With the kingdom in disarray, support for the Lancaster cause grew once more; this time led by Henry Tudor.



If Henry proved to be victorious, he pledged to marry Edward IV's daughter, Elizabeth of York, to unite the two houses. At the Battle of Bosworth, Richard III was defeated and Henry was crowned king—King Henry VII. This began a new start for England, no longer divided, but now under one name, the Tudors.

To strengthen foreign affairs, Henry VII married off his daughter, Margaret Tudor, to James IV of Scotland and his son, Arthur, to Katherine of Aragon. These marriages would ensure peace between England, Scotland, and Spain. However, Arthur died shortly after his marriage. Henry VII then proposed that his second son, Henry, should marry Katherine. That Henry would soon become known as Henry VIII.

"Henry VIII was first published, together with thirty-five other plays, in 1623 in the book we now call The Shakespeare First Folio. Until Edmond Malone did so in 1790, no one suggested that the play was the work of anyone else but Shakespeare; and until James Spedding made the argument in 1850, no one attempted to attribute parts of it to John Fletcher, Shakespeare's successor as principal dramatist of the King's Men. Since Spedding, a number of different scholars, using different methods, have attempted to discriminate between those parts of the play to be credited to Fletcher. These scholars have arrived at no consensus, although all who see the play as jointly authored have agreed that the collaborators who wrote the play included Shakespeare and Fletcher. Opinion has continued to fluctuate about whether the play is a work of collaboration or is solely Fletcher's or is solely Shakespeare's, with belief in collaborative authorship currently in the ascendant."

—Paul Werstine and Barbara A. Mowat
Henry VIII, The Folger Shakespeare Library



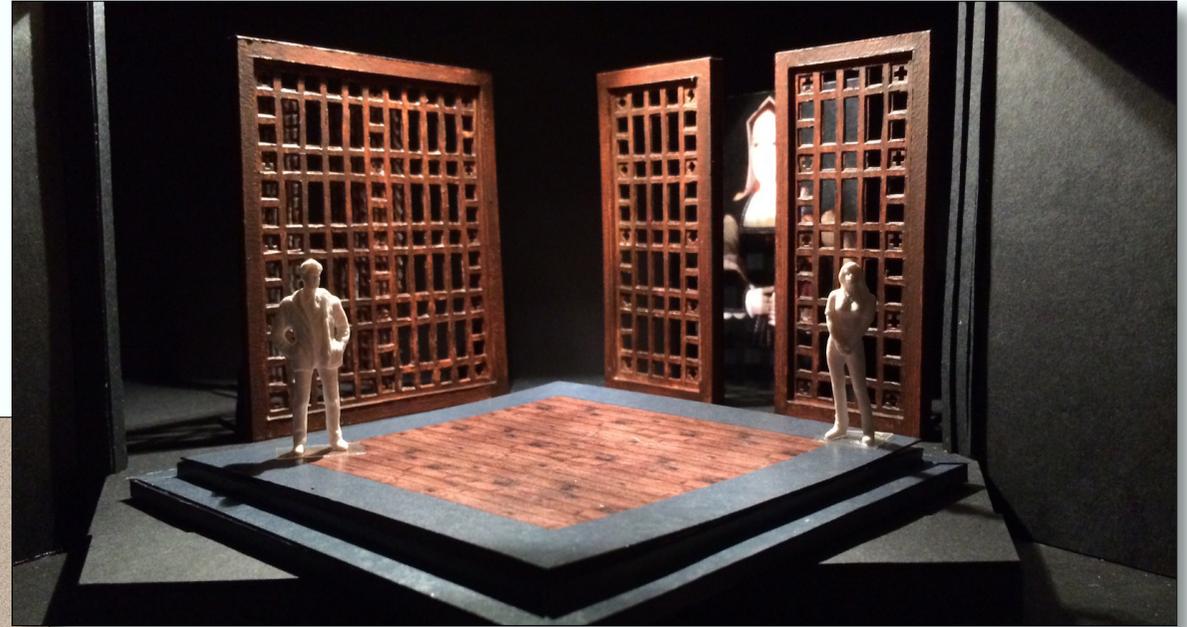
Portrait of King
Henry VIII in Early
Manhood,
Artist Unknown



Portrait of
Thomas Wolsey
(1475-1530),
Royal Minister,
Archbishop of York
and Cardinal,
Artist Unknown



In *This Production*



Above: Costume designs for King Henry (*left*) and Katherine (*right*) by Hugh Hanson.

Right Above: Set design by Charlie Calvert.

Right Below: Costume designs for Cromwell (*left*) and Patience (*right*) by Hugh Hanson



Henry VIII

Consider the Source...

Holinshed's *Chronicles*

Shakespeare relied heavily on Holinshed's *Chronicles* as a source for his history plays, and this is true for *Henry VIII* as well. Shakespeare predominately utilized the second edition, published in 1587, which became a very popular source for playwrights in 16th and 17th century England. Some scholars speculate that a majority of the action in *Henry VIII* is derived directly from the *Chronicles* and could be a reason for the lack of dramatic action in the play.

George Cavendish's *Life of Wolsey*

Another source Shakespeare may have utilized in writing *Henry VIII* is George Cavendish's *Life of Wolsey*. Cavendish was an usher to Cardinal Wolsey during his time in Henry's court. In this particular biography, Cavendish offers an eyewitness account to Wolsey's downfall as well as a first person perspective into life in the court of Henry VIII, political events of the 1520s as well as a peek into the divorce proceedings between Katherine of Aragon and King Henry VIII.

John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*

Book of Martyrs by John Foxe is another possible source for Shakespeare. Written early in the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, the work chronicles events surrounding the English Reformation

and outlines some of the conflicts between Catholics and English Protestants, and was likely a popular read during Shakespeare's time. The beginning of the book sheds light on Thomas Cranmer's early years studying the scriptures as well as his final moments before execution at the hands of Henry's daughter Queen Mary I (Bloody Mary) as a result of his Protestant views and denouncement of Catholicism.

Samuel Rowley's *You See Me You Know Me*

Samuel Rowley's early history play *When You See Me You Know Me* is considered another probable source for Shakespeare's *Henry VIII*. This play was published in 1605 and was performed by Prince Henry's Men, an acting troupe to which Rowley belonged, in 1604 at the Fortune Theatre. The play focuses on the conflict surrounding Cardinal Wolsey and the birth and early education of Prince Edward VI. Although there are some historical inaccuracies, including the fact that Wolsey is still alive at the end of the play, the story champions Edward as a hero of Protestantism, defending his sister Elizabeth and Thomas Cranmer.

Equal Time

Henry's story is the subject of multiple plays and many of the above mentioned sources; however, his wives and children have become popular source material for everything from the Showtime series "The Tudors" to Allison Weir's bestselling historical biographies, including: *The Six Wives of Henry VIII*, *The Children of Henry VIII*, *The Lady in the Tower*, and *The Life of Elizabeth I*.



Explore Online

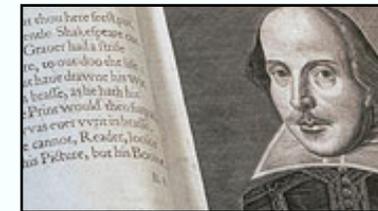
A link to the King Henry VIII page on the Official Website of the British Monarchy

<http://www.royal.gov.uk/historyofthemonarchy/kingsandqueensofengland/thetudors/henryviii.aspx>



A link to the Folger Shakespeare Library's *Henry VIII* page

<http://www.folgerdigitaltexts.org/?chapter=5&play=H8&loc=p7>



A link to the Shakespeare's Birthplace Trust website

<http://www.shakespeare.org.uk/home.html>





Sources & Further Reading

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THE ARDEN SHAKESPEARE: HENRY VIII, edited by Gordon
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THE COMPLETE IDIOT'S GUIDE TO SHAKESPEARE,
by Laurie Rozakis

FREEING SHAKESPEARE'S VOICE by Kristin Linklater

THE FRIENDLY SHAKESPEARE by Norrie Epstein

THE FOLGER SHAKESPEARE LIBRARY: HENRY VIII, edited by
Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine

LECTURES ON SHAKESPEARE by W. H. Auden

THE MIRACLE OF LANGUAGE by Richard Lederer

SHAKESPEARE A TO Z by Charles Boyce

SHAKESPEARE AFTER ALL by Marjorie Garber

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SHAKESPEARE OUR CONTEMPORARY by Jan Kott

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