



SHAKESPEARE THEATRE COMPANY
EDUCATION PROGRAMS



RICHARD II

by William Shakespeare
directed by Michael Kahn

FIRST FOLIO:

TEACHER CURRICULUM GUIDE

Welcome to the
Shakespeare Theatre Company's production
of
Richard II
by William Shakespeare

Dear Teachers,

Consistent with the STC's central mission to be the leading force in producing and preserving the highest quality classic theatre, the Education Department challenges learners of all ages to explore the ideas, emotions and principles contained in classic texts and to discover the connection between classic theatre and our modern perceptions. We hope that this *First Folio Teacher Curriculum Guide* will prove useful as you prepare to bring your students to the theatre!

First Folio Guides provide information and activities to help students form a personal connection to the play before attending the production. First Folio Guides contain material about the playwrights, their world and their works. Also included are approaches to explore the plays and productions in the classroom before and after the performance.

First Folio Guides are designed as a resource both for teachers and students. We encourage you to photocopy articles you find helpful and distribute them to your students as supplemental reading.

Sincerely,
The Shakespeare Theatre Company
Education Department

Enjoy the show!

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The First Folio Teacher Curriculum Guide for ***Richard II*** was developed by the Shakespeare Theatre Company Education Department.

ON SHAKESPEARE

For articles and information about Shakespeare's life and world, please visit our website ShakespeareTheatre.org, to download the file *On Shakespeare*.

Next Steps

If you would like more information on how you can participate in other Shakespeare Theatre Company programs, please call the Education Hotline at 202.547.5688 or visit our website ShakespeareTheatre.org.

NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS



Shakespeare Theatre Company's production is part of *Shakespeare for a New Generation*, a national initiative sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts in cooperation with Arts Midwest.

Miles Gilburne and Nina Zolt are founding sponsors of the education programs at the Shakespeare Theatre Company.

Synopsis of RICHARD II

King Richard II and his uncle John of Gaunt try to settle a quarrel between Henry Bolingbroke (Gaunt's son) and Thomas Mowbray.

Bolingbroke accuses Mowbray of murdering Gaunt's brother Thomas of Woodstock.

Mowbray cannot say what he knows: that

Richard himself ordered the assassination. The King cannot calm them, so he allows them to compete in a trial by combat. But he abruptly stops the joust before it begins, and instead sentences the two to banishment from England: Mowbray permanently and Bolingbroke for six years (reduced from ten to lessen his father Gaunt's despair). Inconsolable, Gaunt rails against Richard and dies, and Richard opportunistically seizes Gaunt's lands and money. Henry Percy (Earl of Northumberland), Lord Ross and Lord Willoughby all criticize the king for a litany of abuses, including taking money from Gaunt and other nobles to fund a war with Ireland and taxing the commoners. Angered by

these seizures, Bolingbroke secretly returns to England with their help. Bolingbroke's and Richard's uncle the Duke of York warns Bolingbroke that he is wrong to defy the King's order of banishment.

Bolingbroke defeats and executes Richard's councilors, Sir John Bushy and Sir Henry Green for "misleading" the King. Meanwhile, Richard returns from war in Ireland to discover that his armies are crumbling and that many nobles and commoners are joining Bolingbroke's rebellion. Despondent, Richard flees to Flint castle with York's son Aumerle, the Earl of Salisbury, Sir Stephen Scroop, and the Bishop of Carlisle. When Bolingbroke arrives, he asks Richard to repeal his banishment in exchange for peace.

While he agrees to return to London with Bolingbroke, Richard suspects that Bolingbroke will force him to surrender the crown. When they arrive, The Bishop of Carlisle warns that England will fall into chaos because of the usurpation, so Northumberland arrests him.

Bolingbroke then forces Richard to hand over the crown to him, making him King Henry IV.

Richard is ordered by Henry IV to go to northern England, and Richard's queen is ordered to return to her native France. York tells his wife of Richard's tragic journey through the streets of London, where the commoners threw dust and trash at him. York then discovers a plot by his son Aumerle (renamed Rutland by Henry IV for supporting Richard) to assassinate Henry. York runs to inform King Henry, but Aumerle and his mother plead for pardon, which Henry reluctantly grants.

Sir Pierce of Exton believes that Henry wishes Richard

dead, and kills Richard in prison at Pomfret castle (in our production, Richard is killed by Ross). King Henry has the Earl of Salisbury, Lord Spencer, Sir Thomas Blunt, and the Earl of Kent executed for supporting Richard, and Sir Leonard Brocas and Sir Bennet Seely for plotting with Aumerle to kill Henry. The Abbot of Westminster kills himself to avoid capture, though the Bishop of Carlisle is ordered by Henry to live out his days in some remote place. Finally, Exton brings Richard's corpse to the king. Henry, however, is not happy to see Richard dead, fearing that his death will create more trouble. He banishes Exton, and vows to travel to the Holy Land as penance for Richard's murder.



Wallace Acton as **Richard II** in the Shakespeare Theatre Company's 2000 production.

An Interview with the Director: Michael Kahn discusses *Richard II*

When we were planning the season last year, it really interested me to deal with an issue that was on everyone's mind before the Presidential election (and still is today): what are the qualities we look for in a leader in a time of crisis? So we decided to find two plays that would contrast ideas of leadership, and who better to go to than Shakespeare, who really understood politics and power? We picked two contrasting plays: *Richard II*, about a leader who is born with power and misuses it, but then as that power is stripped from him learns what it means to be a human being; and *Henry V*, about a flawed human being who learns what it means to be a great leader. We hope that this repertory of plays will add to the discussion of what a person needs to do to lead a nation. Richard is mercurial and moody, he goes from one extreme of emotion to another very quickly, and he has very grandiose ideas about himself.



*Edward Gero as Henry Bolingbroke and
Richard Thomas as Richard II.
Photo by T. Charles Erickson.*

Now, many of those qualities might arise if you were told from birth that you were put on earth by God to run the country, but in addition to his belief in the divine right of kings, his personality seems to fit into a modern understanding of a classic narcissist. That insight has opened up for me a way of looking at him as a person who is more than just careless.

As always, one is continually amazed by Shakespeare's understanding of what we now know as modern psychology. We've done this play several times at the Shakespeare Theatre Company, and I've always been aware of how mystified the audience is for the first four scenes. There's been a murder before the play begins, but as an audience we don't know the importance of the person who has been killed, or how much maneuvering is going on behind the scenes. The audience loves the poetry and the pageantry of those first scenes, but they usually don't know what is going on until the fifth scene. That concerned me, and so I found a wonderful unfinished Elizabethan play (the author is unknown, but some scholars attribute all or part of it to Shakespeare) called *Thomas of Woodstock*, which tells the story of the events that lead up to *Richard II*. Thomas is Richard's powerful uncle, and he is the one who dies under mysterious circumstances. So we're going to start *Richard II* with scenes from that other play, which will help us to understand the duplicity that goes on in those early moments, when almost everybody is lying and trying to make sure that nobody else tells the truth.

Historical Context of *Richard II*: Setting the Stage for the Wars of the Roses

The Wars of the Roses marked a dark period in England's history. The conflict centered around two opposing sides of the same Plantagenet family – the Houses of York and Lancaster, both descendants of King Edward III – who fought for possession of the crown. The name “Wars of the Roses” comes from the traditional use of the red rose as a symbol for the House of Lancaster and the white rose as a symbol for the House of York. Shakespeare dramatizes the conflict in a series of eight plays: *Richard II*, *Henry IV Parts I and II*, *Henry V*, *Henry VI Parts I, II and III* and *Richard III*. Although the first battle of the war was officially fought in 1455, the roots of the war can be traced to a question of **succession** in 1377, the year that Edward III died and young Richard II became king at the age of ten.



A portrait of King Edward III.

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

Shakespeare's *Richard II* begins at this point in history, with an unpopular Richard confronting battling noblemen and many enemies at court, including his cousin Henry Bolingbroke. In the opening scene, Henry (the son of Richard's uncle, John of Gaunt, the Duke of Lancaster), accuses Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk (who is not related to Richard) of treason, specifically claiming that he was responsible for the murder of his and Richard's uncle, the Duke of Gloucester, despite widespread suspicion that Richard ordered the murder himself. Richard initially responds to Henry's accusations by ordering the two men to fight to the death to settle the disagreement, but changes his mind and exiles both men instead.

While Henry is in exile, his father John of Gaunt dies and Richard illegally and unfairly claims Henry's inheritance for himself. When the Lancastrian Henry returns to England to claim his inheritance, the support he garners is enough to seize not only his inheritance but the throne itself, and Richard is **deposed** (removed from the monarchy) and imprisoned. Henry's claim to the throne is tenuous and not as strong as Richard's. Even when Richard dies childless, heirs remain whose right to the throne supersede Henry's. Richard's deposition thus defies **Divine Right**; many citizens believe that the newly crowned King Henry IV has gone against God's will by removing Richard and that God will eventually take revenge. Fifty years later, when the Wars of the Roses begins, many citizens see what they believe to be the **prophecy** coming true.

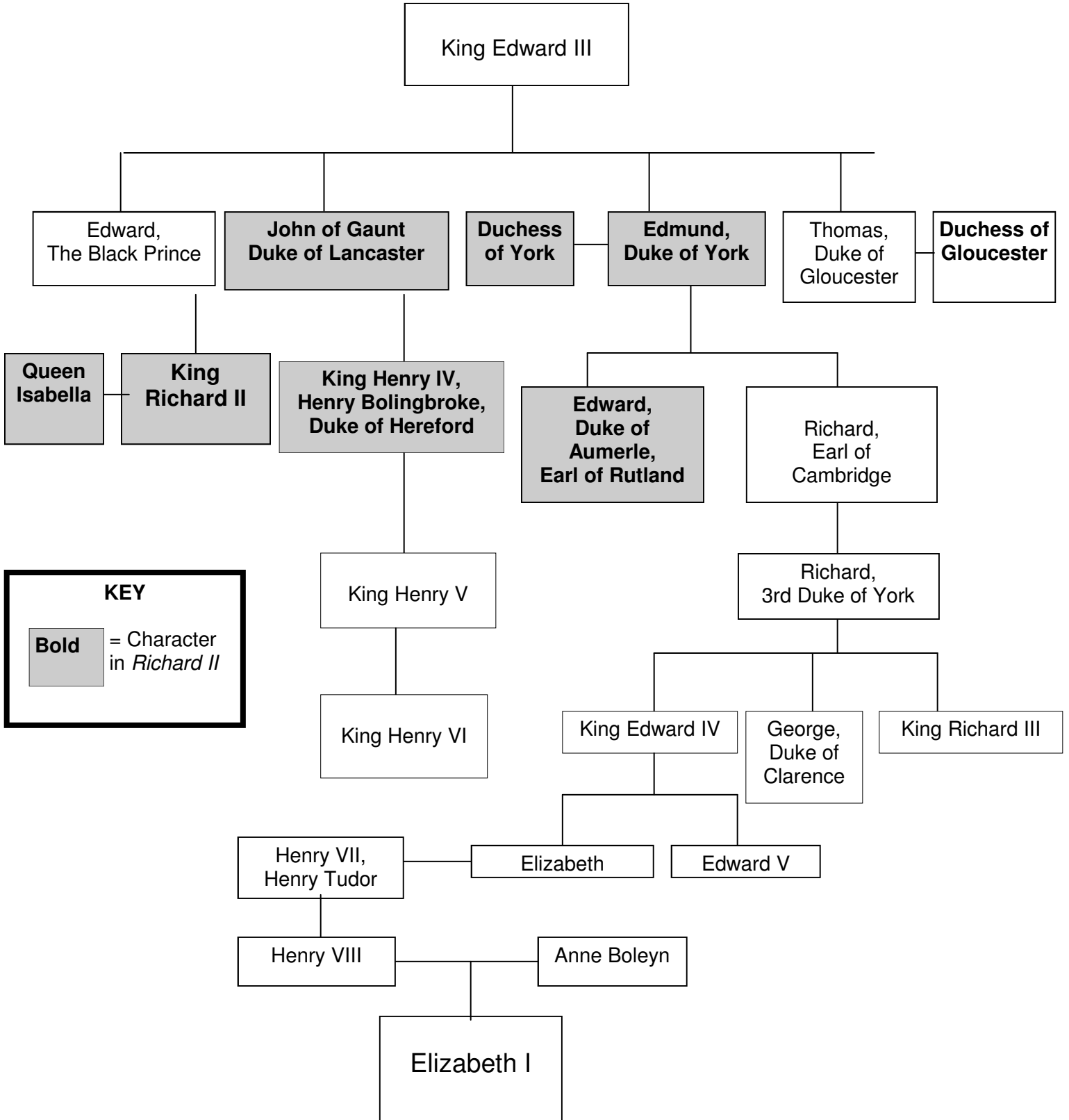


A portrait of King Henry IV.

As with all of Shakespeare's history plays, *Richard II* is based on real historical events and people. However, he made the stories theatrically interesting by condensing and simplifying events, taking liberty with chronology and altering characters' actions and ages to tell a compelling story.

GLOSSARY: Using a dictionary, define the bold words in this article as well as any others you don't recognize. What do they mean? Look for them in the text as you read *Richard II*.

It's All Relative: Richard's Family Tree



Who Gets to be King? The Rules of Succession

In 14th-century England, the rules of succession were strict: heirs to the throne were chosen according to royal bloodlines; only members of the royal bloodline or direct descendants of the king could become the next monarch. The order of inheritance was based on **primogeniture**—the right of the eldest son to inherit his parents' estate. Primogeniture, the rule of inheritance for both citizens and **sovereignty**, included many provisions in case an eldest son did not exist or died prematurely. In primogeniture's most basic form, when a king died, the crown passed to his eldest son. If his eldest son died before him and had no heir, the crown passed to the next oldest son of the king who died, and so on through the sons of the deceased king. If no male child was born to the monarch, the crown then passed to his eldest daughter. If the deceased monarch had no children, the crown would go to his oldest brother. If this brother died before the king, the crown passed to the king's next oldest brother. The order of succession stretched far beyond siblings and children to guarantee an undisputed heir to the throne, even if the king's entire immediate family died before him.

What does primogeniture mean? What claim can Henry lay to the crown? (Hint: look at the family tree). Since Henry and Richard are first cousins, why did Richard initially become king rather than Henry?

The Divine Right of Kings

The divine right of kings is the belief that royal authority to rule comes only from God. According to Divine Right, any attempt to remove a proper monarch would be seen as acting against God's will—a mortal sin deserving divine punishment.

“Not all the water in the rough rude sea
Can wash the balm off from an anointed king.
The breath of worldly men cannot depose
The deputy elected by the Lord.
For every man that Bolingbroke hath pressed
To lift shrewd steel against our golden crown,
God for His Richard hath in heavenly pay
A glorious angel. Then, if angels fight,
Weak men must fall, for heaven still guards the right.
King Richard, act 3, scene 2

However, later in the play Richard resigns himself to his fate and agrees to go peacefully with Henry to London: “God save King Henry, unkinged Richard says / And send him many years of sunshinedays” (act 4, scene 1).

King Richard's belief that he was chosen by God to rule England plays an important role in *Richard II*. Richard references his special relationship with God often, and claims that God will seek vengeance against those who try to remove His chosen king from the throne. When Richard learns of Henry's growing strength, he dismisses the notion that Henry poses a real threat and he remains confident that God will protect him.

NEXT STEPS

1. Why do you think Richard agrees to give up his crown to Henry? What does this decision mean for him given his belief in the Divine Right of Kings?
2. Paraphrase, or put into your own words, Richard's lines above. Identify any vocabulary you don't recognize. What is Richard saying? How do Henry's forces respond?

“Landlord of England art thou now, not king.”

John of Gaunt, act 2, scene 1

At the beginning of act 2, Richard's uncle, John of Gaunt (father of the future King Henry IV) makes his true feelings known on his deathbed. He claims that Richard has misused the privileges that come with his title and that his grandfather King Edward III would have been ashamed of him: “O, had thy grandsire with a prophet's eye / Seen how his son's son should destroy his sons, / From forth thy reach he would have laid thy shame” (act 2, scene 1, lines 110-113). Gaunt's observations give the audience further information about the reasons why Richard is so disliked.

What does John of Gaunt mean when he says that Richard is a “landlord” rather than a king? What does he imply that Richard has failed to do? What were the expectations of kings during this time period? What are some current expectations of political leaders?

Classroom Connections

Before the performance

Tackling the Text: Strategies for Close Reading

In order to fully appreciate Shakespeare's text, it is important to understand his language. *Richard II* and *King John* are unique among Shakespeare's plays in that they are written entirely in verse, meaning lines of poetry that have a specific structure. "Blank verse" refers to lines of poetry that don't rhyme.

Below are a few key terms that are helpful to use when exploring Shakespeare's text with your students.

- **Scansion** refers to the process of breaking a line of text down into syllables and identifying the stresses.
- **Paraphrasing** is a good way of making the text more accessible for students by having them put it in their own words.
- **Operative words** are the words that are essential to telling the story. They are the most important words in a line of Shakespeare's text. Operative words are generally in this order of importance: verbs, nouns (including title and names the first time they are mentioned), adjectives and adverbs.
- **Iambic pentameter** is the main rhythmic structure of Shakespeare's **verse**. One line of iambic pentameter has ten syllables which are broken up into five units of meter called "feet." Each iambic foot contains two syllables: the first syllable is unstressed and the second syllable is stressed. Therefore, five feet of iambs equal one line of iambic pentameter.
- Unlike iambic pentameter, **prose** is not in any verse structure. Shakespeare used prose to indicate familiarity between characters of all social classes as well as to express conversation between the lower classes.

To get started, try a well-known example of iambic pentameter from *Romeo and Juliet*:

u / u / u / u / u /
But soft! What light through yonder window breaks?

Next, have students do a close reading of the following passage from *Richard II*:

"For God's sake, let us sit upon the ground
And tell sad stories of the death of kings—
How some have been deposed, some slain in war,
Some haunted by the ghosts they have deposed,
Some poisoned by their wives, some sleeping killed.
-*King Richard, act 3, scene 2, lines 160-165*

Put the lines up on the board. Ask students to first read the lines aloud and identify any unknown words. Once all words have been defined, paraphrase the lines—what is Richard saying? Next, identify the operative words in the passage by circling them. Using the operative words as a starting point (hint: operatives are always stressed) ask students to scan the lines, using the symbol **U** for unstressed and / for stressed, and determine the meter. [Teacher's note: the lines are mainly iambic pentameter, although there can be arguments for some variations].

- What is the context of the passage? What does it tell us about Richard at this point in the play? Why do you think Shakespeare chose to write *Richard II* entirely in verse?

Classroom Connections

Before the Performance

A Precursor to Richard II

Director, Michael Kahn chose to add a scene to *Richard II* from the play, *Thomas of Woodstock*. This anonymous and unfinished play was written in 1592 or 1593. *Thomas of Woodstock* tells the story of Richard's falling out with his uncle Woodstock, and his plot to have him murdered. This murder is what Bolingbroke and Mowbray are arguing about at the beginning of Shakespeare's play, *Richard II*.

Research *Thomas of Woodstock* and discover why some scholars refer to it as *Richard II, Part One*. Why do you think Kahn chose to add a scene from *Thomas of Woodstock* to this production?

Richard and History

Research the real life of King Richard II and the life of one political leader from the 20th century. Write a 3-4 page paper comparing and contrasting these two leaders. Be creative and explore both personal and public information, including life events, world events, personality, political endeavors and achievements, and legacy.

After the performance

Leader of the Pack

What makes someone a good leader? Is there a difference between being a good leader and being an effective one? How would you differentiate between the two?

Work in groups to come up with a list of people you think exemplify the qualities of a good leader. Once this list is compiled, make a list of attributes of a good leader. Compare your lists: Do your leaders have all of the attributes? Which person has the most?

Where would Richard II fit in? Which attributes does he possess? Discuss the difference between Richard's attributes as a leader versus someone from your list.

Share your opinion: theatre criticism

Now that your students have seen the STC production of *Richard II*, have your students write reviews of the performance. Encourage students to highlight the production elements (actor performances, costumes, set, fight choreography, etc.) and themes that made an impression on them, either positively or negatively. Focus on being as specific as possible; instead of saying "I didn't like the lights" or "I loved the costumes" add details to explain why.

Once students have written their reviews, find others from outside sources (i.e. *City Paper*, *The Washington Post*, etc.) and analyze them. How do their reviews compare? Do they agree or disagree with the outside critics?

Resource List: *Richard II*

Shakespeare Dictionaries

- Schmidt, Alexander. *Shakespeare Lexicon and Quotation Dictionary*. Dover, 1971.
- Onion, C.T. *A Shakespeare Glossary*. Oxford University Press, 1986.

Books on Shakespeare

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Books on Teaching Shakespeare

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 - Reynolds, P. *Teaching Shakespeare*. Oxford University Press, 1992.
 - Rosenblum, Joseph. *A Reader's Guide to Shakespeare*. Salem Press, Inc., 1998.
 - Toropov, Brandon. *Shakespeare for Beginners*. Writers and Readers Publishing Inc., 1997.
- Websites
- *In Search of Shakespeare: Shakespeare in the Classroom* — pbs.org/shakespeare/educators/
- The companion website to Michael Wood's four-part PBS series *In Search of Shakespeare*, this site includes extensive research about Shakespeare's life and works, as well as interactive features.
 - Folger Shakespeare Library — folger.edu
- Includes excellent resources for further reading about Shakespeare, as well as fun games and information designed specifically for students and teachers.



Theatre Etiquette: A Guide for Students

Above all, it is important to remember that the actors on stage can see and hear you at the same time you can see and hear them. Be respectful of the actors and your fellow audience members by being attentive and observing the general guidelines below.

The phrase “**theatre etiquette**” refers to the special rules of behavior that are called for when attending a theatre performance.

Here are some important things to do *before* you go inside the theatre:

- ◆ Turn off your cell phone and any other electronic devices (iPods, games, etc.), or better yet, leave them in coat check. It is very distracting, not to mention embarrassing, when a cell phone goes off during a performance. The light from cell phones and other electronic devices is also a big distraction, so please no text messaging.
- ◆ Spit out your gum.
- ◆ Leave all food and drinks in the coat check. NO food or drinks are allowed inside the theatre.
- ◆ Visit the restroom before the performance begins. Unless it is an emergency, plan to stay seated during the performance.

During the performance:

- ◆ **React to what’s happening on stage:** Please feel free to have honest reactions to what is happening onstage. You can laugh, applaud and enjoy the performance. However, please don’t talk during the performance; it is extremely distracting to other audience members and the actors. Save discussions for intermission and after the performance.

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

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

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