

2004 Study Guide for *Henry VI, Part Three* by William Shakespeare

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**Before seeing/reading the play**

1. Research the English traditions of primogeniture and the divine right of kings. What did it mean to be an “anointed king” in the 1400s? What role did religion play in the power of a king? How reliant was the king on the nobility? How could this dependency cause jealousy and rivalry amongst the nobles? These and other websites provide information:  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Divine\\_right\\_of\\_kings](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Divine_right_of_kings)  
[http://www.wordiq.com/definition/Divine\\_Right\\_of\\_Kings](http://www.wordiq.com/definition/Divine_Right_of_Kings)  
<http://www.elizabethan.org/compendium/41.html>  
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Primogeniture>
2. Research these figures who appear in *Henry VI, Part Three*: King Henry VI; Queen Margaret, formerly Margaret of Anjou; Edward, Prince of Wales; Richard, Third Duke of York; Edward, Duke of York, later King Edward IV; George, Duke of Clarence; Richard, Duke of Gloucester, later King Richard III; Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick, called “Kingmaker”; Henry Tudor, Earl of Richmond. This and other websites provide information:  
<http://www.britainexpress.com/History/medieval-people.htm>
3. Create a family tree for the Plantagenets from Edward III to Richard III. Include the relationships of the Plantagenets to Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick, and Henry Tudor, Earl of Richmond. This and other websites provide information:  
<http://www.britroyals.com/plantagenet.htm>
4. Research the Wars of the Roses. What years did it span? Describe the major causes of the conflict. How did the dynamics of the Plantagenet family contribute to the Wars of the Roses? Who were the major players? What was the outcome? Why was it called the Wars of the Roses? Research the battles of Towton and Tewkesbury in the Wars of

the Roses. These and other websites provide information:

<http://www.wars-of-the-roses.com>

<http://www.luminarium.org/encyclopedia/tewkesbury.htm>

<http://www.britainexpress.com/History/battles/tewkesbury.htm>

5. Research the Machiavellian figure or “Machiavel” as he appeared in Elizabethan drama. How did the name come to be applied to individuals who carried out their villainy by indirect methods? Why did the Elizabethans distrust sneaky villains more than men of action? Why was the “Machiavel” a popular figure in Elizabethan theatre? These and other websites provide information:

<http://www.shmoop.com/richard-iii/richard-iii.html>

<http://www.answers.com/topic/machiavel-2>

6. In Elizabethan and medieval England, what were considered “womanly” qualities? What behaviors would cause a woman to be regarded as “unnatural”? These and other websites provide information:

[http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/medieval\\_women.htm](http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/medieval_women.htm)

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women\\_in\\_the\\_Middle\\_Ages](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women_in_the_Middle_Ages)

7. Research the revenge tragedy and identify its principal elements? These and other websites provide information:

[http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Revenge\\_play](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Revenge_play)

<http://www.everything2.com/title/Revenge+Tragedy>

[http://www.britaininprint.net/shakespeare/study\\_tools/revenge.html](http://www.britaininprint.net/shakespeare/study_tools/revenge.html)

8. Research the story of Daedalus and Icarus in Greek mythology. How is King Minos connected to their lives? These and other websites provide information:

<http://www.island-ikaria.com/culture/myth.asp>

<http://www.verticalpool.com/icarusmyth.html>

9. In presenting historical events, what obligation does a writer have to be true to the facts? What are the pitfalls of fictionalizing events and presenting them as history? Of fictionalizing historical characters and presenting them as biography? Find examples of modern-day films that have taken liberties with historical events and figures to create a more compelling story.

## Resources

### Books:

*Shakespeare's English Kings* by Peter Saccio

*Asimov's Guide to Shakespeare* by Isaac Asimov

*The Sunne in Splendor* by Sharon Kay Penman

*Wars of the Roses* by Alison Weir

*The Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland* by Raphael Holinshed

### Learn more about Shakespeare's life and times at the following websites:

<http://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/Library/SLT/index.html>

<http://www.folger.edu/template.cfm?cid=865&CFID=6230886&CFTOKEN=25420173>

<http://www.shakespeare.org.uk/explore-shakespeare.html>

<http://shakespeare.palomar.edu/life.htm>

<http://www.bardweb.net/man.html>

### After seeing/reading the play

1. Discuss the nature and importance of family and networks of kinship in the play. How are titles, wealth and land passed to successive generations? What values and other legacies descend through families? What loyalty can family members expect of each other? Identify the moment when family ties begin to break down. Why do people let their kin down? When do they turn against each other, and why?
2. Refer to your research on the standards for "womanly" behavior. How does Henry's weakness force Margaret to assume a more active role? What measures does she take to protect her son and his rights? Why is she called "unnatural" rather than "motherly" for defending her son? How might the situation have been resolved if Margaret had behaved in a more "womanly" manner? What animal images are used to describe her? Why is she generally blamed when things go wrong?
3. Refer to your research on the battles of Towton and Tewkesbury. In each, who is fighting whom? What is the size of the fighting force? What are the weather

conditions? What are the specific objectives? What events, significant to the action of the play, take place at each battle?

4. What is the significance of a king and a man who would be king being “enthroned” on a molehill (Act II, scene v, and Act I, scene iv, respectively)? Compare York’s and Henry’s humiliation and sense of loss.
5. In Act II, scene v, why isn’t King Henry allowed to participate in the battle? Describe the individual pieces that make up the scene and the King’s emotions in each. What does he long for? To what is he forced to resign himself? The scene provides the only glimpse we have of how the nobles’ war is affecting the common people. How do the two men happen to be soldiers? How do they end up fighting on opposite sides? In what ways are they and the King similar? What is the dramatic effect of such a contemplative scene in the midst of ferocious battles?
6. Chart the status of these individuals as they rise and fall through the play: King Henry VI, Warwick, King Edward, George (Duke of Clarence), Richard (Duke of Gloucester), Queen Margaret, Prince Edward, Lady Gray. Tell the story from the point of view of each of them.
7. Identify the point in the play at which the various parties cease to be concerned about the legitimacy of their claims to be king. What becomes the standard by which they judge their right to rule?
8. What does Warwick hope to accomplish by arranging the marriage between King Edward and Lady Bona of France? On what grounds is Lady Gray an unsuitable bride for a king? What complications does Edward introduce into his kingship by marrying her? What enemies does he make? Whose loyalty does he lose? Compare this marriage to Henry’s marriage to Margaret.
9. Refer to your research on revenge plays. Which elements of a revenge tragedy are present in *Henry VI, Part Three*? List the characters who are motivated by the lust for revenge. For each, identify the moment when his or her other motives give way to revenge. What damage, and committed by whom, is each determined to punish? How successful is the revenger? How satisfied?

10. Why does Edward want to be King of England? How legitimate is his claim? How successful a monarch is he? What is his principal weakness? Why does he forgive his brother Clarence? Why does he trust his brother Richard?
11. What expectations of George, Duke of Clarence, are disappointed? Why does he betray his brother Edward? What promises does Warwick make to him? When does he realize Warwick will not keep his promises? What prompts him to return to his family loyalty? What are his grievances against Edward? Against Warwick? Refer to the Plantagenet family tree. If Clarence is serious about becoming king, whom would he have to get rid of and why? How do George's character and successive conversions serve as a microcosm of the world of the play?
12. What persona does Richard, Duke of Gloucester, present to the world? If you had to base your opinion of him entirely on his physical appearance and public actions, what would you think of him? What physical deformities are described? What are his emotional, spiritual and moral deformities? What reason does he give for wanting to be king? What is he willing to do to gain the crown? Refer to the Plantagenet family tree. Whom does Richard have to kill to become king? Refer to your research on the "Machiavel". What characteristics of the popular stage villain, the Machiavel, does he exhibit? Since he takes us (the audience) into his confidence, in effect making us his accomplices, how do you feel about him? How is Shakespeare blatantly advertising his next play, *Richard III*?
13. Do a close reading of Richard's soliloquy in Act III, scene ii, beginning with the lines, "Well say there is no kingdom then for Richard; / What other pleasure can the world afford?" What obstacles keep Richard from becoming king instead of his brother Edward? What are Richard's physical, mental and emotional deformities? What reasons does he give for ambition for the crown? What conventional human activities and comforts will being king replace for him?
14. Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick, is known to history as the Kingmaker. Which kings and would-be kings does he assist? Refer to the Plantagenet family tree. How is he related to the contenders for the crown of England? Whose right to rule does he truly believe in? What does he hope to gain by "making" kings? What are his plans for King

Edward IV? Identify the moment he tries to take charge. How does Edward thwart him? What in Edward's reputation should warn that he won't be easily manipulated?

15. Who is Henry Tudor, Earl of Richmond? Who does he become? What does King Henry prophesy for him? Why is his life in danger? Refer to the Plantagenet family. What claim does he have to the throne of England? Whom would he have to get rid of to claim it? Why might Shakespeare have chosen to introduce him into the plot?
16. List the atrocities that take place onstage. What is the dramatic effect on the audience of witnessing so much violence? Identify the offstage atrocities. Which characters are beheaded? How are the heads subsequently abused? Find other instances when bodies are desecrated. How do these acts of violence reflect the condition of England during the Wars of the Roses?
17. In most of Shakespeare's history plays, at least one character has the best interest of England at heart. Who fills this function in *Henry VI, Part Three*?
18. Shakespeare took liberties in organizing events in his history plays. Rutland, for example, was a 17-year-old soldier at the time of his death. What dramatic end is served by presenting him as an innocent child slaughtered by Clifford? Historically, Margaret was not present when the Duke of York was killed. How does it influence the drama for her to taunt him so cruelly and wield the? How do these revisions of history prepare the way for subsequent events in the play?
19. List the situations in which the words *crown* and *throne* are used to represent kingship. Find the moments when these physical objects are part of the action. Who sits on a throne and under what circumstances? Who wears a crown and under what circumstances?
20. Refer to your research on the myth of Daedalus and his son, Icarus. Describe the parallels King Henry draws between himself, his son and their situation in Act V, scene vi. What other elements of the myth does he incorporate? What other relationships in the play might be compared to the myth?

21. Identify the animal imagery. Which characters are referred to as birds? As lambs? As wolves? As lions? What other animals are evoked? What words other than the names themselves are used to evoke animals? What is the effect of repeatedly comparing humans to animals?
  
22. At the end of the play, how does Shakespeare prepare you for the possibility of a “sequel”? What stories are left incomplete? What promises are made?

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