

## 2014 Study Guide for *Richard III* by William Shakespeare

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### Before seeing/reading the play

1. Research the Wars of the Roses in England, which occurred 1455–1471. Research these historical figures and their roles in the Wars of the Roses and the aftermath. Which are bound by family relationships? Which by friendship and loyalty?

- King Henry VI, Queen Margaret and their son, Edward
- Edward IV and sons, Edward and Richard
- Elizabeth Woodville, Lady Gray, later Queen Elizabeth
- Richard Plantagenet and Cicely Neville, Duke and Duchess of York
- George, Duke of Clarence
- Richard, Duke of Gloucester (later Richard III)
- William Lord Hastings
- Henry Stafford, Earl of Buckingham
- Thomas Stanley, Earl of Derby
- Henry Tudor, Earl of Richmond
- Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick and his daughter, Anne

These and other websites provide information:

<http://www.warsoftheroses.com/>

<http://www.britainexpress.com/History/medieval-people.htm>

2. Research the rules of succession and primogeniture in England. What are the means by which a man can become king? Who succeeds when a king dies? What did it mean to be an “anointed king” in the 1400s? What role did religion play in the power of a king? These and other websites provide information:

<http://www.mrdowling.com/703-primogeniture.html>

<http://www.elizabethan.org/compendium/41.html>

[http://www.princeton.edu/~achaney/tmve/wiki100k/docs/Divine\\_Right\\_of\\_Kings.html](http://www.princeton.edu/~achaney/tmve/wiki100k/docs/Divine_Right_of_Kings.html)

3. Research the historical Richard III. How was he, the youngest son, able to become king? Of what notorious crimes is he accused? Describe the widely held case for his innocence. These and other websites provide information:  
<http://www.richard111.com/>  
<http://historymedren.about.com/library/who/blwwrichard3.htm>
4. Shakespeare describes Richard III as physically deformed. How did people in the Renaissance view physical deformities? How was the historical Richard III physically deformed? These and other websites provide information:  
[http://www.richardiii.net/2\\_4\\_o\\_riii\\_appearance.php#intro](http://www.richardiii.net/2_4_o_riii_appearance.php#intro)  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monstrous\\_birth](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monstrous_birth)
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 was the “Machiavel” a popular figure on the Elizabethan stage? These and other websites provide information:  
<http://www.answers.com/topic/machiavel-2>  
<http://www.shmoop.com/richard-iii/richard-iii.html>
6. Research the revenge tragedy and identify its principal elements? These and other websites provide information:  
<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)
7. Research the medieval notion of the Wheel of Fortune. These and other websites provide information:  
[http://www.themiddleages.net/wheel\\_of\\_fortune.html](http://www.themiddleages.net/wheel_of_fortune.html)  
[http://issuu.com/gisackson/docs/medieval\\_wheel\\_of\\_fortune\\_kyle\\_adams\\_and\\_tucker\\_ro](http://issuu.com/gisackson/docs/medieval_wheel_of_fortune_kyle_adams_and_tucker_ro)
8. Research the concepts of divine retribution and divine justice. These and other websites provide information:  
<http://www.studylight.org/dic/hbd/view.cgi?number=T1636>  
[http://www.ehow.com/facts\\_6771510\\_define-divine-justice.html](http://www.ehow.com/facts_6771510_define-divine-justice.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? Find examples of modern-day films that have taken liberties with historical events and figures to create a more compelling story. In the specific case of *Richard III*, why might Shakespeare have found it preferable to alter events in Richard's career?

## Resources

### Suggested Reading:

*Henry VI, Parts One, Two and Three*, William Shakespeare

*The Daughter of Time* by Josephine Tey

*The Sunne in Splendour* by Sharon Kay Penman

*The Year of the King* by Anthony Sher

*Shakespeare's English Kings* by Peter Saccio

*Wars of the Roses* by Alison Weir

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

### Film/TV:

*Richard III* (1955), with Laurence Olivier

*Richard III* (1983), BBC, with Ron Cook, directed by Jane Howell

*Richard III* (1995), with Ian McKellen

*Looking for Richard* (1996), documentary, with Al Pacino

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

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

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/tudors/shakespeare\\_early\\_01.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/tudors/shakespeare_early_01.shtml).

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

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

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

### After seeing/reading the play

1. Refer to your research about the events dramatized in *Richard III*. How has

Shakespeare altered the historical facts, personalities and timelines? What is gained by these alterations? What is lost? What contemporary events was Shakespeare possibly responding to, and how was he revising history to shed light on them?

2. List the descriptions of Richard's deformities. Who describes them? Whom does he blame for them? What areas of human experience, in his opinion, do they bar him from? How does he intend to compensate for his losses? Describe instances when he uses his deformities as a weapon. How are Richard's physical deformities reflected in his moral, emotional and psychological deformities?
3. How do Richard's physical actions run counter to his descriptions of himself as deformed and therefore disabled? How do Richard's encounters with women run counter to his descriptions of himself as undesirable? What does he really believe himself capable of accomplishing with women? What does Lady Anne see in him?
4. Refer to your research on The Wars of The Roses and Richard III's life. Who besides Richard might have a legitimate claim to the throne? Whom does he kill to get the throne? Whom does he kill to keep it?
5. Richard III is a villain who draws the audience into his plotting. Describe your relationship as an audience member with Richard. Which of his words and actions cause you to admire and even like him? Which qualities gain your sympathy? Which cause you to fear him? To dislike him? How do you feel about his confiding his plans to you, thereby drafting you as his accomplice? Do your feelings change as the play progresses? What specific events prompt the change? How is Richard's relationship with you connected to his relationships with the play's characters?
6. Refer to your research on the Machiavel. Find examples of Machiavellian hypocrisy in Richard's dealings. Whom does he deceive and how? In each case, describe the Character that Richard plays for his victim. How does the deception move him closer to his goal? How is the deceived person injured by his or her mistaken belief?

7. List your favorite examples of Richard's extraordinary skill with words. What does he manage to accomplish with words alone? Find instances when he apparently says one thing while he means something altogether different. When he tells a lie that is taken for truth. When he tells the truth, intending it to be misunderstood. Find occasions when Richard seems to accuse someone of villainy while describing himself. Which characters are able to resist his words? To what does he resort when his power to control events with words fails him?
8. Describe Richard's plot to be rid of his brother George, Duke of Clarence, and why he believes it is necessary. Of what is George accused, and why? What false image of himself does Richard act for George? What promises does he make? What action does he secretly plan? Why does George persist in his belief that Richard is good? Why is George an obstacle to Richard's ambition? What sins and crimes has George committed?
9. In the first scene, Richard describes how he intends to exercise his powers of manipulation. In Act I, scene ii, we see him in action. Who are the two men for whom Lady Anne mourns? How did each die? Whom does she blame for their deaths? What is her status without them? How does Richard make her feel guilty and obligated to him? How does he establish his dominance over her? How does he use words? What other tactics does he use? Why does Anne agree to marry him, knowing he will kill her? How does she curse herself? How do you feel about Richard by the end of the scene?
10. Refer to your research on Elizabeth Woodville. What was her station before she married King Edward IV? Historically, how did she improve the wealth and status of her family at the expense of King Edward's family? Why are she and her family at odds with Buckingham and Hastings? What place does Richard seem to occupy in the political maneuvering? What are his intentions toward her and her kin?
11. Refer to your research on Henry Stafford, Earl of Buckingham. Describe him. How is he related to the Queen's family? What qualities account for his affinity for Richard and Richard's for him? What does Richard promise him? What other goals might Buckingham have? What atrocity of Richard's proves too much for Buckingham? What failure of Buckingham's causes Richard to dismiss him? Why does Buckingham revolt?

12. Refer to your research on Thomas Stanley, Earl of Derby. How is he related to the Plantagenets? How is he related to Henry Tudor? What keeps him from declaring his allegiance to one side or the other? How does his wavering affect the outcome of the Battle of Bosworth? Historically, when, how and why did his loyalties shift?
13. Study Richard's monologues. For each, determine
  - a) its place in the action
  - b) what Richard is telling us
  - c) how he moves the action forward
  - d) the effect of his words on us
14. Compare the plights of the four women in the play, Queen Margaret, Queen Elizabeth, the Duchess of York and Lady Anne. What are the principal "womanly" roles assigned to each? With which men is she allied? What status does she derive from these men? What does she suffer because of Richard? What resources does she have for striking back? How does she affect his plans? How does she contribute to his downfall?
15. Chart the rise and fall of Margaret through the three parts of *Henry VI* and *Richard III*. How have events transformed her from a powerful queen into an impotent, enraged crone? What wrongs have England's present rulers and their supporters done to her? What wrongs has she done to them? List the specific curses Margaret utters against her enemies. How do they receive the curses? At what point does each come true?
16. Describe the young princes. Had Prince Edward lived to be an adult, what kind of king do you think he would have become? What kind of advisor would his brother have made? How does Richard erode the princes' powers and protections? Why does he find it necessary to have them killed? What has England lost when the boys are lost?
17. Refer to Act III, scene v. What roles do the conspirators Richard and Buckingham play for the mayor and citizens? What supporting players does Richard enlist to make himself appear pious and humble? Popular? Why do the conspirators pretend that Richard is unwilling to accept the crown? How do they adjust when the scene doesn't go according to plan?

18. List and describe the dreams in the play. In each case, who is the dreamer? How is he affected by his dream? Which dreams predict the future? What do the objects and actions in each dream symbolize, and how do they relate to objects and occurrences in the waking world? Which people meet disaster because they don't pay attention to their dreams?
19. What does Richard hope to achieve by marrying his niece, Elizabeth? Why does he think Queen Elizabeth will agree to the union? Describe his tactics in trying to persuade her to support his courtship. What tricks does she use to make him think he has prevailed? Why does he believe her? What are the consequences of her deception?
20. Refer to your research on the Wheel of Fortune. Chart Richard's rise and fall in terms of the medieval iconography of humans trapped by Fortune's Wheel. Which changes does he bring about for himself? Which changes are the result of the actions of others?
21. Refer to your research on Henry Tudor. How is he related to the Plantagenets? How legitimate is his claim to the English crown? Following the battle, what actions did he take to solidify his hold on the crown?
22. Shakespeare scholar Peter Saccio suggests that Richmond plus the eleven ghosts who visit Richard the night before the battle comprise a jury condemning him to death. What crimes does each accuse him of? How guilty is he? What sentence is passed on him?
23. Contrast the mood in the opposing camps on the night before the Battle of Bosworth (Act V, scenes ii–iv). What is the tone of the conversations? The sense of moral rightness and the workings of divine justice? Why are Richmond's men fighting? What tack does he take in encouraging them? What are Richard's men fighting for? What approach does he take in his battle speech? What do these contrasting speeches tell you about the two leaders?
24. Refer to your research on Divine Justice. Why was it considered necessary to God's plan for Henry Tudor to defeat Richard III and rule England? Why was it politically prudent for Shakespeare to present Tudor as a heroic figure?

25. List the occurrences of animal imagery. To what beasts is Richard compared? Which comparisons address his physical deformities and which his personality traits? Who makes the comparisons? What other characters are compared to animals, which animals and why?
26. To what dramatic genre would you assign *Richard III* and why? Invent a hybrid if you like.
27. If you are familiar with *Macbeth* and *Othello*, compare Richard's self-aware villainy to the villainy of Macbeth and Iago. How much does each character plan his actions and how much does he take advantage of circumstances? To what extent does he recognize that he will eventually be destroyed? To what extent does this inevitable outcome influence his actions? What is the dramatic effect of witnessing, even sympathizing with, a character who consciously chooses evil, knowing he himself will be destroyed by it.

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