

Individual Learning Packet

**Teaching Unit**

**Richard III**

by William Shakespeare

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# Richard III

## Notes

*Richard III* brings to a close Shakespeare's exhaustive dramatization of the Wars of the Roses, or the battle between the York and Lancaster families for the throne of England. A saga that seemed to come to an end with the triumph of Henry V, and his diplomatic marriage, unraveled with the early death of Henry VI and the licentious absentmindedness of Edward IV. By the time of Edward IV's death, conditions were rife for tragedy.

And so enters Richard, Duke of Gloucester, onto the stage of history. His physical deformities mirrored a lack of conscience, an unabated greed, and a shameless charm that carried him through numerous obstacles to the throne of England. His bloody path, however, churned up so much antipathy that his rule was doomed to be brief. It is his psychological unraveling that makes *Richard III* timeless.

All references come from the Dover Thrift Edition, copyright in 1995.

## Objectives

By the end of the Unit, the student will be able to:

1. discuss the importance of ethics and conscience in political leaders.
2. discuss the motif of the boar and the hell-hound in this story as an image representing the visceral nature of ambition and envy.
3. illustrate and explain the use of characterization to foreshadow impending tragedy in regard to the following characters:
  - Richard III
  - The Crown Prince
  - Henry Richmond.
4. discuss the struggle between outrage and personal ambition in the motivations of those characters mesmerized by Richard's promises.
5. discuss the ways sublimated guilt can lead to conscious paranoia and subconscious terror.
6. discuss the use of oxymoron, paradox, and irony to demonstrate contradictory impulses and desires within a person.
7. illustrate and explain the use of events in the lives of others to foreshadow the possible future for Richard, including the following:
  - Richard's initial declaration of self-loathing
  - The Crown Prince's worried arrival at the tower of London
  - Richard's early betrayal of his brother, Lord Clarence
  - Richard's magnanimous promises to his supporters, including Lord Buckingham
  - the visits of the ghosts of Richard's victims to Richard and Henry Richmond before the battle.
8. discuss the interplay of metaphor, simile, and personification to create a wealth of images reflective of the story's themes and ideas.
9. identify the irony of the title of the play.
10. define vocabulary words from the play.
11. discuss the ways in which the temptations and possibilities of politics in Shakespeare's time are analogous to the temptations and possibilities of the current political system in America.

### Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. If you have seen the movie version of *Richard III* starring Ian McKellen, discuss the motivation behind the major differences in the setting, including the following:
  - changing the time period for Renaissance England to Germany before the Second World War
  - replacing the medieval weaponry with the tanks, bombs, and biological weapons of the early twentieth century
  - changing the traditional dress of the English royalty to the uniforms of the Nazi regime.
2. How is imagery, including metaphor, symbol, and simile, used to foreshadow Richard's downfall in his conversations with Queen Margaret?
3. Why do you think England has never had a King Richard IV? Explain.
4. Explain the decrease in Richard's patience over the course of the play, with regard to the way he treats his subordinates and greets news, both good and bad.
5. Discuss the use of nature and animals as symbols for characters, including the sun, the boar, and the hell-hound.
6. What is Richard's attitude towards women, especially Lady Anne, Queen Margaret, Queen Elizabeth, and the Duchess of York? What do you think is the source of this attitude?
7. How are the concepts of providence and divine sovereignty incorporated into the plot and outcome of this play?
8. In what ways does Shakespeare insinuate the intellectual and ethical inferiority of the noble class?

# Richard III

## Act I, Scene I

### VOCABULARY

**capers** – plays carelessly  
**deity** – divine or powerful status  
**descant** – comment upon  
**dreadful** – inspiring fear and awe  
**hearkens** – follows or pursues emotionally  
**knave** – rascal or traitor  
**lascivious** – dealing with fleshly and sexual pleasures  
**lour'd** – lowered  
**partake** – take hold of, participate or share in, enjoy  
**rudely** – unattractively  
**suppliant** – one making a request  
**visaged** – referring to facial expression

1. In Richard's opening monologue, he refers to his unattractive appearance; this impression is repeated by other members of the play. What are the thematic purposes of having Richard be unpleasing to the eye?

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2. What is Richard's plan, according to his opening monologue?

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3. What is the irony in the trap laid for the Duke of Clarence?

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**Act II, Scene I**

VOCABULARY

**countermand** – order contradicting a prior order  
**embassage** – diplomatic mission  
**surmise** – guess or estimate

1. How is Buckingham’s vow to Queen Elizabeth an example of foreshadowing?

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2. How does Richard’s vow to Queen Elizabeth show his utter lack of self-awareness?

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3. How is Richard’s explanation of Clarence’s death ironic?

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**Act III, Scene IV**

VOCABULARY

**beseech** – beg  
**bootless** – useless  
**ere** – before  
**strumpet** – a woman prostitute

1. How does Hastings show his clear lack of perception about Richard?

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2. What is Richard's pretext for executing Hastings?

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**Act V, Scene III**

VOCABULARY

**alacrity** – swift dexterity  
**distain** – tarnish  
**lour** – lower  
**valiant** – courageous

1. What effect does the specific ordering of the ghosts visiting Richard and Richmond have?

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