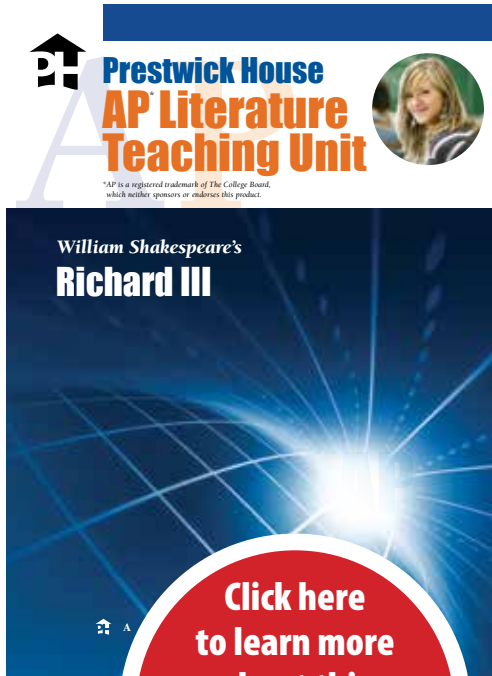




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Teaching Unit

Richard III

by William Shakespeare

written by Elizabeth Osborne



Prestwick House

Item No. 303078

Richard III

Objectives

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

1. relate key aspects of the history behind *Richard III*
2. evaluate the historical circumstances in which *Richard III* was written, including
 - major events in 1590s England
 - Elizabeth I's connection to the Wars of the Roses
3. recognize the difference between a historical figure and the persona presented in a fictional medium.
4. discuss a writer's reasons for portraying historical events and persons the way he or she does.
5. interpret some of Shakespeare's views on the relationship between a ruler and the state. What makes a good monarch?
6. explain the role that the Earl of Richmond plays in *Richard III* and tell what historical moral Shakespeare was delivering through this character's triumph.
7. analyze the process of turning history into drama.
8. analyze the use of rhetorical and dramatic devices used in the play.
9. respond to multiple-choice questions similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition exam.
10. respond to writing prompts similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition Exam.

Background Lecture

THE WARS OF THE ROSES

In order to appreciate *Richard III*, it is important to understand some basic history about the Wars of the Roses and the lineage of Shakespeare's most important patron, the very powerful Queen Elizabeth I.

The Wars of the Roses were a series of battles fought to determine who would control England. There were two factions: the Yorks, represented by a white rose, and the Lancasters, represented by a red rose. The struggle was extremely complicated and long-running. In the end, the winner was neither a York nor a Lancaster, but the founder of the new Tudor dynasty, Henry VII—grandfather of Queen Elizabeth I. In this play, he is referred to as the Earl of Richmond.

Readers of *Richard III* should know the following about the Wars of the Roses:

- Richard, Duke of Gloucester, fought on the side of the Yorks. He eventually became King Richard III.
- At the Battle of Tewkesbury, Queen Margaret (wife of King Henry VI) and her son Edward, Prince of Wales, fought against Yorkist forces led by Richard (III) and his brother Edward (later King Edward IV). The Lancastrians were defeated; Prince Edward (Wales) was killed, and King Henry (VI) was murdered in the Tower of London shortly thereafter. As the play begins, this battle has just ended; Richard (III)'s brother Edward is king, everyone is celebrating, and the corpse of King Henry is being carried to his grave.
- Richard (III) and Edward (IV)'s brother George, Duke of Clarence, was married to Isabel Neville, the daughter of Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick (called "the Kingmaker") and sister to Anne. Warwick expected his son-in-law to support him in a battle that took place shortly before Tewkesbury, but George, Duke of Clarence supported his brother Edward instead. Warwick was killed in the battle.
- Warwick's other daughter, Lady Anne Neville (Isabel's sister), was betrothed to the Prince Edward (Wales) who was killed at Tewkesbury. After Prince Edward's death, Richard (III) pursued and married Anne.
- At the Battle of Wakefield, in 1460, Margaret and her forces were responsible for the death of Richard Plantagenet, 3rd Duke of York, who was the father of Richard (III), Edward (IV), and George, Duke of Clarence. After Richard (Plantagenet)'s death, his head was supposedly placed on a pike and given a paper crown. Richard (III) mentions this when he speaks to Margaret in Act I, Scene III. He also refers to "pretty Rutland"—this was his youngest brother Edmund, Earl of Rutland, supposedly killed by Margaret's forces.

Because the British Royal Family and the history of the period is filled with so many people with similar names, this family tree may be helpful. Persons who are characters in the play are indicated:

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. What is Richard's ultimate motivation in the play, and how is it related to his appearance? Does his physical deformity explain or excuse his actions? Give examples of different viewpoints on this subject that are expressed in the play.
2. How is Anne portrayed in the play? In particular, is she characterized as intelligent? Why does she agree to marry Richard?
3. Some people see *Richard III* as pro-Tudor propaganda, while others point out that Richmond, the savior of England in the play, is a much less interesting character than Richard. Why might Shakespeare have drawn the characters this way?
4. How much power does Queen Elizabeth have in *Richard III*? What choices does she make? Does she rise or fall in the play?
5. Revenge seems to be important to many of the characters in *Richard III*. How important is the fulfillment of revenge to the conclusion of the play?
6. What conclusions can be drawn from *Richard III* regarding high and low birth? Does noble birth guarantee that a person will be good or successful? Why might Shakespeare have chosen to include ideas on this topic?
7. Infer some of Shakespeare's ideas on government and power from the underlying assumptions in *Richard III*. What makes a good ruler? Compare these ideas to those at the foundation of modern democracy.
8. What is the role of religion in *Richard III*? What religious beliefs do the characters seem to espouse? Where do they mention God, destiny, and fate?

Richard III

Act I, Scene I

1. What has happened just before the play begins? How can you tell?

2. What dramatic technique does Shakespeare use to open the play? What does it tell us about Richard?

3. What images does Richard use to describe Edward in his opening speech? What images does he use for himself?

4. How do pun and antithesis contribute to the tone of the opening speech and suggest Richard's character?

5. Historically, the Duke of Clarence won't die for several years. For what possible reason(s) would Shakespeare want to condense events and have the arrest of Clarence early in this play?

6. What terms does Richard use here that alert us to his idea of himself as stage master, almost like a playwright manipulating the actors around him?

Act II, Scene I

1. Explain the several instances of dramatic irony in this scene. How are they related? What might they suggest will occur in the rest of the play?

2. What earlier scene does Richard's speech that ends, "I thank my God for my humility" echo? How are these scenes similar?

3. To what situation is Gloucester referring when he says of the queen, "How that the guilty kindred of the queen/Look'd pale when they did hear of Clarence's death?"

Act III, Scene I

1. What does Edward mean when he says, “our crosses on the way/Have made it tedious, wearisome, and heavy/I want more uncles here to welcome me”?

2. Explain the dialogue involving young Edward, Hastings, and Buckingham about young York’s being in sanctuary with his mother. Do not merely summarize what each says, but explain the significance of what they are saying.

3. What point is Shakespeare illustrating in the prince and Gloucester’s conversation about Julius Caesar and the construction of the Tower?

4. What is the significance of Richard’s comparing himself to the Vice, Iniquity?

5. What practical and dramatic purposes does the exchange of wit between York and Gloucester serve?

6. On what ominous note does this scene end? What conspiracy does the conversation between Buckingham and Catesby reveal to the audience?

Act IV, Scene I

1. How does the language of this scene echo Act II, scene ii, which also featured women?

2. How does Elizabeth’s apostrophe intensify the pathos of this scene?

3. Who or what is the “Richmond” to which Elizabeth sends her son Dorset?

Act IV, Scene V

1. This is not the first time Derby has appeared in the play. Who is he? How do you know?

2. What do we learn of Richard's attempts to woo his niece Elizabeth?

Act V, Scene I

1. What day is it? What significance does Buckingham find in this?

Act V, Scene II

1. Why does Richmond refer to Stanley as his father?

2. What elements of Richard's speech echo language used earlier in the play?

3. How does Blunt contradict a key Machiavellian principle by which Richard has ruled?
