

William Shakespeare's Henry V

Plot

Believing that the French may have usurped lands and titles from his ancestors, young King Henry invades France after an insulting gift of tennis balls from the dauphin. Before sailing for France, he executes 3 traitors sent to assassinate him. At Harfleur, Henry encounters stiff resistance after breaching the city walls. Thrown back, King Henry heartens his forces with a patriotic, rallying cry and threatens the Governor of Harfleur who surrenders. At the battle of Agincourt, Henry's roaring speech predicts a great day. The English win and return to London to negotiate peace. Henry courts Princess Katherine and all parties consent to the marriage. The Chorus predicts that Henry VI will lose France through discord and mismanagement.

Themes and Issues

- Good and Evil
- Bravery, Heroism and Cowardice
- Cultural Stereotypes
- Royalty and Leadership
- Loyalty and Rebellion
- Rulers and Commoners
- Male Succession

Language and Structure

- Imagery and symbolism- setting & lighting, war, power, tennis balls, fire, speed, mud, water
- Use of theatrical devices to portray major battles on stage
- Characterization-function of the chorus, low characters, bishops, King of France
- Character development- the change of Henry V from Henry IV Part I, II, his past and maturation
- Textual Paradoxes- Shakespeare reflecting history and predicting the future
- War as horror or glory, fact or propaganda-Battle of Agincourt
- A play-within-a play--- opening of Olivier's film
- Subtext reflected through camera angles
- Political dimensions- peace treaty, Church vs. Parliament,
- Dramatic irony- the chorus' warning of traitors and King Henry's toying with them.

Extended Resources

- Play: Henry V by William Shakespeare, *Arden Series*
- Poem: "Ballad of Agincourt" by Michael Drayton
- Film: Kenneth Branagh's Henry V (1989), Lawrence Olivier's Henry V (1944), John Madden's Shakespeare in Love (1998), Steven Spielberg's Saving Private Ryan (1998), Ridley Scott's Black Hawk Down (2001)
- Websites: www.folger.edu, www.bbc.co.uk,
- Readings/ Activity Ideas: Teaching Shakespeare Today edited by James E. Davis, Shakespeare Made Easy edited by Alan Durband, Henry V Curriculum Unit by Mary Edna Costello (The Center for Learning), Shakespeare The Essential Reference to His Plays, His Poems, His Life and Times, and More by Charles Boyce (1990)

Student Activities

1. WG/V/I Using the opening scene of Olivier's film or Shakespeare in Love, examine the

- Elizabethan stage. Discuss theatrical conventions of the Globe and of the time period---keep this in mind when reading about the battle scenes.
2. WG/L/I Henry V is based on true historic events. Research the time period.
 3. SG/R, S/I In three groups, briefly examine and re-enact the synopsis of Richard II, Henry IV Part 1 or Henry IV Part 2 in order. With each group member actively participating, present the synopsis in a maximum of 2min. ---think of a Shakespeare version of Theatersports.
 4. SG/V/I Using both the Branagh and Olivier films, discuss the different character interpretations of King Henry and the Bishops. Discuss which interpretation best reflects Shakespeare's vision---find clues in the text to support opinions.
 5. SG/S/F Select scenes in which each character has approx. 14lines each. Memorize lines and present the scene with appropriate blocking and characterization. Props and costumes may also be used. Stress the importance of students understanding what they are saying.
 6. SG/W/I Paraphrase and re-write the courting scene between King Henry and Katherine using modern and colloquial language. Read the scene out loud in front of the class.
 7. WG/S/I Examine the role of the chorus. Read the opening prologue as a chorus; use different vocal levels and rhythms. How does it sound? How does it feel to read out loud as a group, is it powerful? Does the chorus ruin the discovery of the three assassins for the audience (Act II line 16-30)?
 8. WG/R/I Discuss the dramatic irony of Act II,sc.ii. How does dramatic irony affect the audience? How does this scene affect your impression of the king?
 9. SG/W/F Create a Sociogram: a visual, graphic organization of characters up to Act III, represent the relationships among the characters (present relationships between characters onto poster. Place King Henry in the center, and indicate all inter-relationships between characters).
 10. WG/V/I Examine the first entrance of King Henry in Branagh's film. What imagery and symbolism to you see or hear? What does the entrance tell the viewer about the king? Take turns making various "entrances" into the classroom---playing with posture, eye contact, pacing...Note the various character impressions/ assumptions different entrances make.
 11. WG/S/I Discuss the differences and similarities of a modern day equivalent i.e. War on Iraq. Compare the battle scenes from Branagh's Henry V, Saving Private Ryan and Black Hawk Down. How has war changed or not changed? Which scenes are more sensitive to the viewer and why? How did Shakespeare depict the battle scenes?
 12. SG/V/I Divide into small groups making sure a chess player is in each group. Choose a scene and assign each character in their scene a chess piece. Ex: pawn= Katherine, king= Henry, Charles...set up the chessboard to reflect the scene. Using the text, explain and justify the piece placements.
 13. I/W/F Using the text, write a letter to a loved one from a soldier's perspective on the night before the Agincourt battle.
 14. SG/R/I Read Michael Dayton's poem "the Battle of Agincourt" written in the 17thc. Compare Shakespeare's interpretation of Agincourt to Dayton's. How are they different?
 15. I/W/F Draw a tabloid magazine cover or propaganda poster for Henry V. Use cover stories, headlines, pictures, gossip...Display covers in the class.
 16. I/W/F Choose the role of the king or a soldier. Throughout reading of the play, keep a journal written from the king's point of view or a soldier's. Note your inner thoughts, feelings, problems, fears, struggles, decisions...as the play progresses. Discuss in class after each act has been read.
 17. SG/W/I Using blank verse, write a soliloquy appropriate for Katherine in response to her upcoming wedding to King Henry.
 18. SG/V/I Deconstruct and compare the aesthetic elements of Branagh and Olivier's films.

- In small groups, focus on one film element: lighting, sound, setting, costuming, camera angle, text... Closely examine, and report to the whole class the details observed.
19. **WG/R/I** Shakespeare uses nature's elements---earth, fire, and water. Discuss the significance of these elements. Re-evaluate and discuss Olivier's interpretation of setting.
 20. **WG/S/I** Closely examine and discuss Act IV, sc.iii. Select two volunteers. One to read the King's Saint Crispin's speech and the other to improvise out loud what the King might be thinking. Therefore, have the reader speak one line at a time while the other interjects "true" thoughts. Try exploring inner thoughts with other favorite scenes.

F=formal assessment, **I**=informal assessment

R=reading activity, **V**=viewing activity, **S**=speaking activity, **W**=writing activity

I=individual, **SG**=small group, **WG**=whole group