

RICHARD III | FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Shakespeare's language can seem scary, but give it a try! *Go at your own pace, and have fun!*



SHAKESPEARE IN PRISON

DETROIT PUBLIC THEATRE'S
SIGNATURE COMMUNITY PROGRAM

This play is based on a true story. Here's the deal.

- It's the year 1400-and-something-or-other (Shakespeare kind of mashed the years together).
- England has just had a civil war. AGAIN. Between the York and the Lancaster families. AGAIN.
- This time around, the Yorks won. (Last time, it was the Lancasters. But that's a different play.)
- The Yorks are led by three brothers: Edward (a.k.a. King Edward IV), George (a.k.a. "Clarence"), and Richard. After winning the war, Edward becomes king, and the other two get fancy jobs and titles.
- So, now everything's good, right?

WRONG! The play opens with Richard, alone on stage, telling the audience about how *not good* everything is—and how he plans to make things even worse...

The Shakespeare

RICHARD

Now is the winter of our discontent
Made glorious summer by this son of York,
And all the clouds that loured upon our house
In the deep bosom of the ocean buried.
Now are our brows bound with victorious wreaths,
Our bruised arms hung up for monuments,
Our stern alarums changed to merry meetings,
Our dreadful marches to delightful measures.
Grim-visaged War hath smoothed his wrinkled front;
And now, instead of mounting barbèd steeds
To fright the souls of fearful adversaries,
He capers nimbly in a lady's chamber
To the lascivious pleasing of a lute.
But I, that am not shaped for sportive tricks,
Nor made to court an amorous looking-glass;
I, that am rudely stamped, and want love's majesty
To strut before a wanton ambling nymph;
I, that am curtailed of this fair proportion,
Cheated of feature by dissembling Nature,
Deformed, unfinished, sent before my time
Into this breathing world, scarce half made up,
And that so lamely and unfashionable
That dogs bark at me as I halt by them—
Why, I, in this weak piping time of peace,
Have no delight to pass away the time,
Unless to see my shadow in the sun
And descant on mine own deformity.
And therefore, since I cannot prove a lover
To entertain these fair well-spoken days,
I am determinèd to prove a villain
And hate the idle pleasures of these days.
Plots have I laid, inductions dangerous,
By drunken prophecies, libels and dreams,
To set my brother Clarence and the King
In deadly hate, the one against the other;
And if King Edward be as true and just
As I am subtle, false, and treacherous,
This day should Clarence closely be mew'd up
About a prophecy, which says that 'G'
Of Edward's heirs the murderer shall be.
Dive, thoughts, down to my soul; here Clarence comes.

The Translation

RICHARD

Now all of my family's troubles have come to a glorious end, thanks to my brother, King Edward IV. All the clouds that threatened the York family have vanished and turned to sunshine. Now we wear the wreaths of victory on our heads. We've taken off our armor and weapons and hung them up as decorations. Instead of hearing trumpets call us to battle, we dance at parties. We get to wear easy smiles on our faces rather than the grim expressions of war. Instead of charging toward our enemies on armored horses, we dance for our ladies in their rooms, to the tune of a love-song on the lute. But I'm not made to be a seducer, or to make faces at myself in the mirror. I was badly made and don't have the looks to strut my stuff in front of women. I've been cheated of a nice body and face, or even normal proportions. I am deformed, spit out from my mother's womb prematurely and so badly formed that dogs bark at me as I limp by them. I'm left with nothing to do in this weak, idle peacetime, unless I want to look at my lumpy shadow in the sun and sing about *that*. Since I can't amuse myself by being a lover, I've decided to become a villain. I've set dangerous plans in motion, using lies, drunken prophecies, and stories about dreams to set my brother Clarence and the king against each other. If King Edward is as honest and fair-minded as I am deceitful and cruel, then Clarence is going to be locked away in prison today because of a prophecy that "G" will murder Edward's children. Oh, time to hide what I'm thinking—here comes Clarence.

If you were to write a play about a modern day "villain," who would the central character be? How much would you stay faithful to what actually happened? What would you dramatize?

And hey... why not write the play? Or any play that pops into your head as you think about this piece?

Richard III is the only play Shakespeare wrote that begins with one character—alone onstage—speaking directly to the audience. (Symbolic characters like the Prologue in Henry V don't count!) Why do you think that is? What does it tell us about Richard, right off the bat?

Now... what does Richard tell us right off the bat? What's his objective—what does he want us to do, and how does he want us to feel?

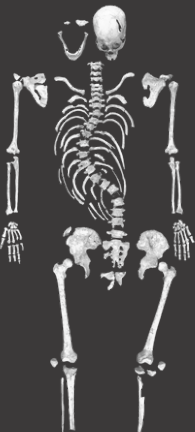
As you read the piece and speak it aloud, do you feel like he's accomplishing his objective with you?

- If so, how does he do it?
- If not, what's his obstacle?
- Could he win you over? If so, how?

Richard is really stuck on his "deformity." The skeleton of the real Richard III (on the left) was discovered in 2012 under a parking lot. (For real.) As you can see, he had scoliosis—his spine was curved—but it wouldn't have been terribly noticeable when he was alive.

Leave it to Shakespeare to take a guy with slightly uneven shoulders and turn him into a "foul bunch-backed toad"—that's one character's very snarky way of calling Richard a hunchback.

But if Shakespeare wasn't literal about it, you don't have to be, either! How do *you* see Richard? Is he physically deformed? Is he imagining the deformity? Is it something else?





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You can respond to these in any way you choose:

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Write

Draw

ACT IT OUT

Talk about it

THINK ABOUT IT

... up to you!



David Garrick. 1772. Richard Mansfield. 1889.

Edwin Forrest. 1855. Edmund Kean. 1814.

Richard has been a dream role for the world's most famous actors for centuries. It's fun to play the villain, right? These images to the left are of some famous performances that became the stuff of legend a loooooong time ago.

You might notice that it's not a very diverse crew. Most super-famous Shakespearean actors have been white guys (often *rich* white guys). But it doesn't have to be that way! Richard, like all of Shakespeare, belongs to everyone. Whoever you are, you get to make him *yours!*

There are so many ways to perform this piece—400 years' worth of interpretations by thousands of actors! Some take it very seriously—they may be menacing, angry, even over the top. Others play Richard more like a comedian—he is often very sarcastic throughout the play, so that can totally work. And there's so much middle ground!

Try out a few interpretations—either as the actor or the director. How well (or not well!) does each interpretation work? Does it change if Richard is played by a woman and/or a person of color? If Richard is played as a woman and/or a person of color?

Richard says that he was "not shaped for sportive tricks, Nor made to court an amorous looking-glass." Have you ever been in a situation you just didn't feel "made" for? How did that feel? How does it make Richard feel, and how do you know?

Not only that, Richard hints pretty strongly that others have made him feel this way... possibly for his whole life. If that's the case, what kind of effect could it have had on him? Does it change your interpretation of the character at all?

Now that you've thought a bit about why this play begins with Richard, alone, speaking directly to the audience, and how an actor could interpret the piece... What could the staging look like? What images come to your mind?

Activities are often helpful and interesting for the actor and the audience. What could Richard be *doing*? This could be anything from eating an apple, to playing solitaire, to doing yoga... or maybe he's just standing there. The possibilities are endless!



Richard seems to prefer the "discontent" of wartime to the "glorious summer" of peace. He liked the "dreadful marches" better than "delightful measures."

Have you ever known someone like that—who preferred when things were difficult and chaotic? Why do you think some people feel that way? What is it about tough times that someone might prefer over easy times?