

# HENRY V | 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

**Act I!** It's 1415, and the young Henry V is king of England, and he's got a problem: He thinks he should also be king of France! Never mind that his reason is a little shaky: a hundred years ago, his great-grandfather said he was the nephew of a French king. Anyway, Henry politely asks the French king to step down. (Somehow, he's considered a great strategist.) In reply, the French king sends back a crate of tennis balls and tells Henry to play with those instead, like the boy that he is. (Ha ha! Funny French joke!) Henry is not amused, so he invades France.

**Act III!** Well, Act II is just 45 minutes of subplot, so let's skip ahead.

**Act III!** Henry sails to France with his army, landing at Harfleur. Things do not go well at first, and the English are beaten back. Most of the English knights are killed or captured. But Henry didn't sail here to get beaten by a bunch of silly French knights, so he has to convince his soldiers to attack again...



## ONCE MORE UNTO THE STAGE, DEAR ACTIVITY PACK!

Perhaps one of these...

### The Shakespeare

Enter the KING, EXETER, BEDFORD, and GLOUCESTER. Alarum. Enter Soldiers with scaling-ladders at Harfleur.

#### KING HENRY

Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more;  
Or close the wall up with our English dead.  
In peace there's nothing so becomes a man  
As modest stillness and humility;  
But when the blast of war blows in our ears,  
Then imitate the action of the tiger;  
Stiffen the sinews, conjure up the blood,  
Disguise fair nature with hard-favor'd rage;  
Then lend the eye a terrible aspect;  
Let it pry through the portage of the head  
Like the brass cannon; let the brown o'erwhelm it  
As fearfully as doth a galled rock  
O'erhang and jutty his confounded base,  
Swill'd with the wild and wasteful ocean.  
Now set the teeth and stretch the nostril wide,  
Hold hard the breath, and bend up every spirit  
To his full height. On, on, you noblest English,  
Whose blood is fat from fathers of war-proof!  
Fathers that, like so many Alexanders,  
Have in these parts from morn till even fought,  
And sheath'd their swords for lack of argument.  
Dishonor not your mothers; now attest  
That those whom you call'd fathers did beget you.  
Be copy now to men of grosser blood,  
And teach them how to war. And you, good yeomen,  
Whose limbs were made in England, show us here  
The mettle of your pasture; let us swear  
That you are worth your breeding, which I doubt not;  
For there is none of you so mean and base  
That hath not noble lustre in your eyes.  
I see you stand like greyhounds in the slips,  
Straining upon the start. The game's afoot!  
Follow your spirit; and upon this charge  
Cry, "God for Harry, England, and Saint George!"  
*Exeunt. Alarum, and chambers go off.*

### The Translation

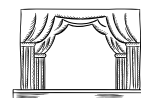
KING HENRY enters, with EXETER, BEDFORD, and GLOUCESTER. Sounds of war. Enter soldiers carrying ladders for scaling the walls that surround Harfleur.

#### KING HENRY

Attack the breach in the city wall once more, dear friends, attack it once more—or else let's close it up with English corpses. In peacetime, nothing looks better in a man than restraint and humility. But when the battle trumpet blows in our ears, then it's time to act like the tiger. With muscles taut and blood stirred up, hide your civilized nature under the guise of ugly rage. Lend your eyes a terrifying gleam and let them jut out from the portholes of the head like brass cannon. Make your brow jut out over your eyes like a frightening cliff over the wild and desolate ocean. Now grit your teeth and let your nostrils flare. Take a deep breath and draw on every impulse to its fullest strength. On, on, you noblest Englishmen, descended as you are from battle-tested fathers, fathers who, like so many Alexander the Greats, have fought in these regions from morning until night, sheathing their swords only when there was no one left to fight. Don't dishonor your mothers! Prove that the men you call your fathers did truly conceive you. Serve as an example to men of common birth and teach them how to fight. And you, good farmers, whose limbs were made in England, show us here the vigor of your upbringing. Prove you are worthy of your birth, which I do not doubt for a moment. For there isn't one of you so low-born that your eyes don't shine with noble luster. I see you're standing like greyhounds on a leash, straining for the moment when you'll be let loose. The hunt is on! Follow your spirit, and as you charge cry, "God for Harry, England, and Saint George!"  
*They all exit to the sounds of battle and gunfire from offstage.*

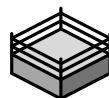
At the beginning of this speech, Henry's soldiers are running away. By the end, they're charging the French castle. In fact, there's nothing else in this scene—this speech is it! So a lot of this scene relies on "acting off the lines"—that is, reactions to the words being spoken. How do you think the soldiers react to Henry's words? When does he win them over? Is it all at once, or little by little?

Proscenium



Audience on 1 side.

In the round



Audience on all sides.

Thrust



Audience on 3 sides.

If you were a soldier, which of these lines would make you re-think your retreat?

Would any of them get you fired up? How fired up would you get? How would you express it?



How about Henry? Does he stand still or move around as he speaks to the soldiers? Are they actively running away at the beginning, or are they hiding? How many soldiers are there? Where are they on stage?

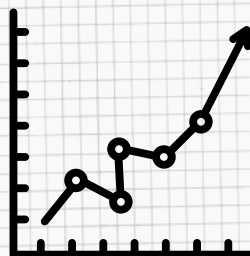
What does he need to do to achieve his objective?

Have you ever been inspired by someone's words enough to do something daring—or foolish? How does that experience affect the way you interpret this scene?

This speech is delivered in the middle of a battle, during a really intense situation. But it's a lot of words, and it can't all be delivered at 100% intensity—there has to be a build, or an arc.

There are almost infinite variations on the arc of this monologue.

What does yours look like? Does it start low and just build up? Or does it have dips and rises? If so, when do they happen? And why?



## NERD ALERT!

In real life, the Siege of Harfleur lasted a month, and it ended with the French surrender, not in a bloody battle. Henry did lose a large part of his army, but the deaths were mostly to diseases carried in dirty water. That's not as good a story, though, so Shakespeare injected some drama into the situation.

Now that you know the actual history, think about the speech a bit. Does it matter to you that the play is called a "history," but totally changes the actual history? Why (or why not)?





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**Act III continued!** Henry's speech works, and his army manages to take Harfleur! However, he lost so many troops that they can't complete Plan A: to march directly to Paris and capture France. So, on to Plan B! ... Alas, there is no Plan B, so Henry marches his army up the coast, with no clear goal. (How is it he's remembered as a great strategist again?) The French gather all their best knights (who, it turns out, are totally scary and not at all silly) and go to eliminate the English army.

**Act IV!** The French army (25,000 knights, plus 35,000 heavily armored soldiers) find the exhausted English army (just 6,000 of whom are left) near a village called Agincourt. The French line up across a field from the English on a rainy night and prepare to attack the next morning. King Henry, feeling a little bad about how not-awesome he is at strategy, walks among his troops at night and gives a beautiful speech about the moral difficulty of leadership (but that's for another activity pack).

In the morning, Henry has to convince his soldiers not to run away or surrender...

**ACT FOUR**  
**SCENE THREE**

You know the drill... **ACT IT OUT** Write **Talk about it** **THINK ABOUT IT** ... up to you!

## The Shakespeare

Enter GLOUCESTER, BEDFORD, EXETER, ERPINGHAM with all his host; SALISBURY and WESTMORELAND.

**GLOUCESTER**  
Where is the King?

**BEDFORD**  
The King himself is rode to view their battle.

**WESTMORELAND**  
Of fighting men they have full threescore thousand.

**EXETER**  
There's five to one; besides, they all are fresh.

**SALISBURY**  
God's arm strike with us! 'tis a fearful odds. God buy you, princes all; I'll to my charge. If we no more meet till we meet in heaven. Then joyfully, my noble Lord of Bedford, My dear Lord Gloucester, and my good Lord Exeter, And my kind kinsman, warriors all, adieu!

**BEDFORD**  
Farewell, good Salisbury, and good luck go with thee!

**EXETER**  
Farewell, kind lord; fight valiantly to-day! And yet I do thee wrong to mind thee of it. For thou art fram'd of the firm truth of valor.

*Exit Salisbury.*

**BEDFORD**  
He is as full of valor as of kindness. Princely in both.

*Enter the KING.*

**WESTMORELAND**  
O that we now had here But one ten thousand of those men in England That do no work to-day!

**KING HENRY**  
What's he that wishes so?

My cousin Westmoreland? No, my fair cousin. If we are mark'd to die, we are enow To do our country loss; and if to live, The fewer men, the greater share of honor. God's will, I pray thee wish not one man more! By Jove, I am not covetous for gold, Nor care I who doth feed upon my cost; It yearns me not if men my garments wear; Such outward things dwell not in my desires. But if it be a sin to covet honor, I am the most offending soul alive. No, faith, my coz, wish not a man from England. God's peace, I would not lose so great an honor As one man more methinks would share from me. For the best hope I have, O, do not wish one more! Rather proclaim it, Westmoreland, through my hose, That he which hath no stomach to this fight, Let him depart, his passport shall be made, And crowns for convoy put into his purse. We would not die in that man's company That fears his fellowship to die with us. This day is call'd the feast of Crispian: He that outlives this day, and comes safe home, Will stand a' tiptoe when this day is named, And rouse him at the name of Crispian. He that shall see this day, and live old age, Will yearly on the vigil feast his neighbors, And say, "To-morrow is Saint Crispian." Then will he strip his sleeve and show his scars, And say, "These wounds I had on Crispin's day." Old men forget; yet all shall be forgot, But he'll remember with advantages What feats he did that day. Then shall our names, Familiar in his mouth as household words, Harry the King, Bedford and Exeter, Warwick and Talbot, Salisbury and Gloucester, Be in their flowing cups freshly remember'd. This story shall the good man teach his son; And Crispin Crispian shall ne'er go by, From this day to the ending of the world, But we in it shall be remembered— We few, we happy few, we band of brothers: For he to-day that sheds his blood with me Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile, This day shall gentle his condition; And gentlemen in England now a-bed, Shall think themselves accurs'd they were not here; And hold their manhoods cheap whiles any speaks That fought with us upon Saint Crispin's day.

## The Translation

GLOUCESTER, BEDFORD, EXETER, ERPINGHAM, with his troops, SALISBURY, and WESTMORELAND enter.

**GLOUCESTER**  
Where is the king?

**BEDFORD**  
The king rode out alone to view their troops.

**WESTMORELAND**  
They have fully sixty thousand fighting men.

**EXETER**  
That's five of them to one of us. Besides, they're fresh.

**SALISBURY**  
May God's arm strike on our side! These are frightening odds. God be with all of you, princes. I'll go and join my men. If we don't meet again before we meet in heaven, still we'll meet joyfully. My noble Lord of Bedford, my dear Lord Gloucester, and my good Lord Exeter, and my kind kinsmen, warriors all, adieu.

**BEDFORD**  
Farewell, good Salisbury; and may good luck go with you.

**EXETER**  
Farewell, kind lord. Fight valiantly today. But then I do you wrong to say as much, since you are the very embodiment of bravery.

*Salisbury exits.*

**BEDFORD**  
He is as full of courage as of kindness, princely in both.

*KING HENRY enters.*

**WESTMORELAND**  
Oh, if only we had with us here ten thousand of those men back home in England who aren't working today.

**KING HENRY**  
Who wishes that? My cousin Westmoreland? No, my dear cousin. If we are slated to die, the fewer, the better for our country, and if we're slated to live, the fewer men, the greater the share of honor for each of us. In God's name, I beg you not to wish for one more man. By God, I am not selfish when it comes to money. I don't care who eats at my expense. It doesn't bother me when people borrow my clothing—I don't care about these concrete things. But if it is a sin to be selfish about honor, I am the most guilty soul alive. No, my cousin, don't wish that even one man who is now in England were here instead. By God, I wouldn't lose as much honor as a single man more would cost me. I think—not even if it meant giving up my best hope for victory. Oh, do not wish one more! Instead, make this known throughout the army: whoever has no spirit for this fight, let him depart. He will be given safe conduct and money for his passage home. We would not want to die in the company of a man who fears to die with us. This day is called the Feast of Saint Crispian: he who lives to see this day out and comes home safe will stand tall when this day is named and raise himself up at the mention of Crispian. He who survives this day and lives to see old age shall yearly entertain his neighbors on the eve, saying, "Tomorrow is Saint Crispin's Day." He'll roll up his sleeve and show his scars, saying, "I got these wounds on St. Crispin's Day." Old men forget. But these men will remember every detail of what they did today long after they've forgotten everything else. And as the wine flows, our names, familiar as household words, will be invoked again: Harry the King, Bedford and Exeter, Warwick and Talbot, Salisbury and Gloucester. Good men will tell their sons this story and the Feast of St. Crispin will never go by, from this day to the end of time, without our being remembered: we few, we happy few, we band of brothers—for whoever sheds his blood with me today shall be my brother. However humble his birth, this day shall grant him nobility. And men back in England now safe in their beds will curse themselves for not having been here, and think less of their own manhood when they listen to the stories of those who fought with us here on St. Crispin's Day.

This speech is, in some sense, exactly the same as "Once more unto the breach." Henry's objective is identical: he needs his soldiers to fight in a difficult situation when they're likely to lose. But his tactics are totally different!

Uh, and this one is clearly much longer. So... let's save some space and recycle some prompts!

What is the arc of the speech?

How do the soldiers "act off the lines?"

Why is this speech longer?

How would you stage the scene?

I AM A KNIGHT!

ONCE MORE ONTO THE TRUCK!

WHICH OF THE TWO SPEECHES WOULD BE MORE LIKELY TO INSPIRE OR MOTIVATE YOU? WHY?

NERD ALERT!

After this scene comes the famous Battle of Agincourt. The rain turned to field between the armies into a mud pit, and the heavily armored French troops sank into it. To escape, they began to remove their armor, and the English archers rained arrows on them from a safe distance. In the end, the English won with only a few hundred casualties. The French lost more than 10,000—and the war!

