King Richard III

Act 1 Scene 1

Outside the Tower of London

Enter RICHARD DUKE OF GLOUCESTER

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 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.
Stagecraft
Richard's soliloquy (in fours)

Richard's opening soliloquy falls into three main parts:

- **Lines 1–13** His comments about the change from war to peace and the character of the new monarch, Edward ('this son of York').
- **Lines 14–27** How Richard feels about the way he looks.
- **Lines 28–41** How he plans to gain power.

A major decision for any director of the play is how to stage this important speech. The conventional way of playing a soliloquy is for the actor to speak directly to the audience, as if inviting them to share his innermost thoughts. In the 1996 movie version starring Ian McKellen, however, Richard speaks the first ten lines as if making a public speech at a state banquet. The rest of the soliloquy is delivered in private in the men's toilet. What ideas do you have for staging this speech?

- **a** One member of your group takes the role of director; the other members each choose one of the three sections listed above and read the lines aloud one after the other. Think about how you might create contrasts between voice, gesture and body language as you swap over from section to section.
- **b** What particular words or images give you clues about how you might play the part? Compile a list in your groups.

1 Dramatic irony (in threes)

Richard has just told the audience how he is plotting to destroy his brother George, the Duke of Clarence, so almost all of what Richard says to Clarence's face is filled with **dramatic irony** (when the audience knows more than a character on stage, see p. 251). Richard pretends to be innocent, but he already knows the answers to the questions he asks.

- Two members of the group take the parts of Richard and Clarence and read through the script opposite from line 43. The third person voices Richard's hidden thoughts at appropriate points. For example, when Richard says, 'Brother, good day', does he mean this? What is he really thinking? Practise reading the script in this way up to line 61, then share your presentation with the rest of the class.
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 mewed 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.

Enter CLARENCE and BRAKENBURY, guarded

CLARENCE
Brother, good day. What means this armèd guard
That waits upon your grace?

RICHARD
Tend’ring my person’s safety, hath appointed
This conduct to convey me to the Tower.

CLARENCE
Because my name is George.

RICHARD
Alack, my lord, that fault is none of yours.
He should for that commit your godfathers.
Oh, belike his majesty hath some intent
That you should be new christened in the Tower.
But what’s the matter, Clarence? May I know?

CLARENCE
Yea, Richard, when I know, but I protest
As yet I do not. But as I can learn,
He hearkens after prophecies and dreams,
And from the cross-row plucks the letter ‘G’,
And says a wizard told him that by ‘G’
His issue disinherited should be.
And for my name of George begins with ‘G’,
It follows in his thought that I am he.
These, as I learn, and suchlike toys as these
Hath moved his highness to commit me now.
Richard claims that Queen Elizabeth has caused King Edward to imprison Clarence, and that she and Jane Shore have become powers behind the throne. Brakenbury’s unease is dismissed with innuendo and sexual puns.

**Themes**

**Richard’s attitude to women**

Richard comments that ‘men are ruled by women’ (line 62). He blames Queen Elizabeth and Clarence blames King Edward’s mistress, Jane Shore, for having Clarence sent to the Tower. In line 64, Richard sneeringly refers to Queen Elizabeth as ‘My lady Grey’ because before her marriage to Edward in 1464 she was the widow of Sir Thomas Grey. Elizabeth used her position as Queen to gain power and influence for her large family, the Woodvilles, and in so doing aroused much jealousy. In the course of the play, Richard frequently refers to both Jane Shore and Elizabeth as sources of trouble, as if they pose a threat to him in his pursuit of power.

- Look through the script opposite and make a list of all the words Richard uses that are insulting to women. As you work through the play, keep in mind Richard’s attitude to women and consider the true extent of women’s power and influence in this society.

1. **Making Brakenbury feel inferior? (in threes)**

Brakenbury (the courtier who is taking Clarence to the Tower) addresses Richard and Clarence as ‘your graces’ (line 84) because they are royal dukes, but Richard calls him ‘man’ (line 90) and makes jokes at Brakenbury’s expense. How might you show their different status on stage?

a. Number each group member 1 to 3, where 1 is someone of very high status, 2 is someone of middle status and 3 is someone of low status. Experiment with how these people relate to one another:
   - How do you look at one another?
   - How do you say hello to one another?
   - How do you sit down, walk around and so on?

b. Take Richard’s line 90 (“We speak no treason, man”) and freeze the action in role as Richard, Clarence and Brakenbury. Show your tableau to the rest of the class. Can they guess who is who, using clues from positioning, body language and facial expressions?

c. Compile a list of reasons why Richard might enjoy trying to make Brakenbury feel inferior. Do you think he succeeds?
RICHARD Why, this it is when men are ruled by women. 'Tis not the king that sends you to the Tower. My lady Grey, his wife, Clarence, 'tis she That tempts him to this harsh extremity. Was it not she and that good man of worship, Anthony Woodville, her brother there, That made him send Lord Hastings to the Tower, From whence this present day he is delivered? We are not safe, Clarence, we are not safe.

CLARENCE By heaven, I think there is no man secure But the queen's kindred and night-walking heralds That trudge betwixt the king and Mistress Shore. Heard you not what an humble suppliant Lord Hastings was for her delivery?

RICHARD Humbly complaining to her deity Got my Lord Chamberlain his liberty. I'll tell you what, I think it is our way, If we will keep in favour with the king, To be her men and wear her livery. The jealous, o'er-worn widow and herself, Since that our brother dubbed them gentlewomen, Are mighty gossips in our monarchy.

BRAKENBURY I beseech your graces both to pardon me; His majesty hath straitly given in charge That no man shall have private conference, Of what degree soever, with your brother.

RICHARD Even so. And please your worship, Brakenbury, You may partake of any thing we say. We speak no treason, man. We say the king Is wise and virtuous, and his noble queen Well struck in years, fair, and not jealous. We say that Shore's wife hath a pretty foot, A cherry lip, a bonny eye, a passing pleasing tongue, And that the queen's kindred are made gentlefolks. How say you, sir? Can you deny all this?

BRAKENBURY With this, my lord, myself have nought to do.

RICHARD Naught to do with Mistress Shore? I tell thee, fellow, He that doth naught with her (excepting one) Were best to do it secretly alone.
Richard promises to do any service he can to ensure Clarence’s release. Alone on stage, Richard reveals that he really seeks Clarence’s death. Hastings swears vengeance on those who caused his imprisonment.

### 1 Saying one thing but meaning another (in pairs)

A major feature of Richard’s language is that his words frequently have double meanings. Listeners hear one thing, but he means something else. Most of what he says to Clarence has a meaning that Clarence does not perceive. For example, when Richard says ‘Brother; farewell’, Clarence probably hears a friendly voice, but Richard may mean ‘Goodbye for ever because you’ll soon be dead’.

- As one person slowly speaks lines 107–16, pausing frequently, the other person says in each pause what Richard probably means.

### Characters

**Who’s who? (in pairs)**

- Draw up a list of who’s who in the play so far and show their relationships to one another. Use the list of characters on pages 4–5 and devise symbols, or a colour code, to show status and relationships between the people who have appeared so far in the scene.
- Where would you fit Lord Hastings? Hastings is a faithful supporter of the House of York, but he is much opposed to Queen Elizabeth and the rest of the Woodville family. Hastings’ influence weakened during the illness of his patron King Edward, and that loss of power may have led to his imprisonment. Hastings was Jane Shore’s lover, however, and she may have used her influence with the King to secure his early release from prison.

### Language in the play

**Birds of prey (by yourself)**

Throughout the play, the imagery of birds and animals is often used to describe Richard.

- Who is Hastings referring to when he talks of ‘the eagles’ (line 133) and ‘kites and buzzards’ (line 134)?
- Write a paragraph describing Shakespeare’s use of animal imagery in this part of the play and its effect on characterisation and atmosphere. Remember to refer to the script in detail and to use embedded quotations.
BRAKENBURY  What one, my lord?
RICHARD   Her husband, knave. Wouldst thou betray me?
BRAKENBURY I do beseech your grace to pardon me, and withal
Forbear your conference with the noble duke.
CLARENCE  We know thy charge, Brakenbury, and will obey.
RICHARD   We are the queen’s abjects and must obey.
Brother, farewell. I will unto the king,
And whatsoe’er you will employ me in,
Were it to call King Edward’s widow ‘sister’,
I will perform it to enfranchise you.
Meantime, this deep disgrace in brotherhood
Touches me deeper than you can imagine.
CLARENCE  I know it pleaseth neither of us well.
RICHARD   Well, your imprisonment shall not be long.
I will deliver you or else lie for you.
Meantime, have patience.
CLARENCE  I must perforce. Farewell.

Exeunt Clarence, Brakenbury, and guards

RICHARD  Go, tread the path that thou shalt ne’er return.
Simple, plain Clarence, I do love thee so
That I will shortly send thy soul to heaven,
If heaven will take the present at our hands.
But who comes here? The new-delivered Hastings?

Enter LORD HASTINGS

HASTINGS  Good time of day unto my gracious lord.
RICHARD  As much unto my good Lord Chamberlain.
Well are you welcome to this open air.
How hath thy lordship brooked imprisonment?
HASTINGS  With patience, noble lord, as prisoners must.
But I shall live, my lord, to give them thanks
That were the cause of my imprisonment.
RICHARD  No doubt, no doubt, and so shall Clarence too,
For they that were your enemies are his
And have prevailed as much on him as you.
HASTINGS  More pity that the eagles should be mewed
While kites and buzzards play at liberty.
RICHARD  What news abroad?
Hastings says Edward is near to death. Richard blames the King’s lifestyle. Alone on stage, Richard hopes that Edward will not die until Clarence has been executed. He reveals his plan to marry Anne.

1 What is King Edward like?

On every page of the play so far, there have been clues to King Edward’s character. ‘Oh, he hath kept an evil diet long’ (line 140) suggests that for a long time Edward has lived wildly.

- Look back at what Richard, Clarence and Hastings have said about Edward so far in Scene 1. Compile a list of between six and ten words that sum up your impression of the King.

Characters

Richard’s revelations (in pairs)

The soliloquy that ends this scene (lines 146–63) offers many opportunities to explore Richard’s wicked revelations through a range of dramatic choices regarding changes in voice inflection, emphasis, tone, pitch, pause and gesture.

a Sometimes actors play the lines with a lot of humour. In line 153, ‘bustle’ (be busy) often gains a laugh as it catches the obvious rogueishness of Richard’s character. Take turns to speak the lines with actions that might be used to provoke laughter.

b Sometimes actors play the lines with a sense of outrageous evil. Lines 149–58, in particular, provoke a response in audiences. Take turns to speak the lines in a way that will most shock the audience.

c In role as an actor, write notes about how you intend to speak this soliloquy and what aspects of Richard’s character you want to portray at each line or two.
HASTINGS

No news so bad abroad as this at home:
The king is sickly, weak, and melancholy,
And his physicians fear him mightily.

RICHARD

Now by Saint John, that news is bad indeed.
Oh, he hath kept an evil diet long
And over-much consumed his royal person.
'Tis very grievous to be thought upon.
Where is he, in his bed?

HASTINGS

He is.

RICHARD

Go you before, and I will follow you.

Exit Hastings

He cannot live, I hope, and must not die
Till George be packed with post-horse up to heaven.
I'll in to urge his hatred more to Clarence
With lies well steeled with weighty arguments,
And if I fail not in my deep intent,
Clarence hath not another day to live:
Which done, God take King Edward to his mercy
And leave the world for me to bustle in!
For then I'll marry Warwick's youngest daughter.
What though I killed her husband and her father?
The readiest way to make the wench amends
Is to become her husband and her father,
The which will I, not all so much for love
As for another secret close intent
By marrying her which I must reach unto.
But yet I run before my horse to market.
Clarence still breathes, Edward still lives and reigns;
When they are gone, then must I count my gains.

Exit
Lady Anne mourns over the corpse of Henry VI. She curses Richard for killing Henry and her husband, Prince Edward, Henry's son.

Stagecraft

‘The corpse of King Henry VI is carried in’

The dead body of the former King is on stage throughout Scene 2 as a dramatic reminder of Anne’s grief and loss. Imagine you are the stage designer: How do you deal with the body on stage? Compile notes and/or sketches in your Director’s Journal. Remember that the body:

- is royal (but this is not a state funeral)
- is of the Lancastrian dynasty
- has been on view for some time as Anne grieves over it
- has to be transported across the stage.

Language in the play

Anne’s grief and anger (in pairs)

a. Together, read Anne’s speech and pick out one key word or short phrase per line. Keeping these key words or phrases in their original order, devise a dramatic presentation of your shortened script. Experiment with different drama strategies, such as tone of voice, choral speech, mime, movement or tableaux. Remember, you cannot add any other words. Share your performances with the rest of the class. Which one is the most effective and why?

b. As an extension to this activity, you could choose some background music that you feel captures the mood and tone of the speech. Be prepared to explain why you think it is suitable.

Write about it

Curses

During the course of the play, several prophecies and curses are made – some of which come true in bitterly ironic ways. In lines 14–28, Anne utters a series of vengeful curses against the man who murdered her husband and his father.

- Write two paragraphs summarising Anne’s curses and commenting on the language she uses. For example, think about the kinds of creatures she refers to and which words she repeats in the course of her speech.