



YALE NATIONAL INITIATIVE

to strengthen teaching in public schools®

Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative
2013 Volume III: John L. Gaddis, Professor of History

The Tangled Web of Richard III: Shakespeare and the Art of Biography

Curriculum Unit 13.03.11, published September 2013
by Elizabeth A. Daniell

So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,
So long lives this and this gives life to thee. (William Shakespeare, Sonnet XVIII)

Content Objectives

Introduction

Former British Prime Minister James Callagan once noted "a lie can be halfway round the world before the truth has got its boots on." It doesn't take much for a lie to become a truth, especially in the high school setting. Idle gossip started during second-period will spread like wildfire across campus and, by day's end, a schoolmate's reputation lies in tatters.

Today, social media—Twitter, Facebook, SnapChat—makes things easier, but, centuries ago, the masters did it better using a medium of their day: the five-act play. By creating a blatantly false retelling of the history of King Richard III in both *Henry VI* and *Richard III*, William Shakespeare sacrificed a king's reputation, even "advocating regicide" ¹ in order to secure Queen Elizabeth's patronage and maintain his theater company's standing in London (not to mention keeping his own head atop his shoulders). Five hundred years later, it is this monstrous version of Richard that is remembered.

A five hundred year old mystery—the whereabouts of the gravesite of England's infamous king—became a trending topic in newspapers and on the Internet in late 2012. The recovery of the king's skeleton—in an anonymous, ignoble grave beneath a car park—has reintroduced Richard III to modern society. The release of gravesite photographs reignited a fascination with one of England's most notorious monarchs. No longer is Shakespeare part of a distant, dusty past; instead, we have a rare opportunity to use current events to introduce the subject of one of Western Literature's Literature's most enduring plays to a new generation of students.

In this unit, students will read *Richard III*; explore the relationship between biographer, reader, and topic; research the biographies of King Richard III, Queen Elizabeth I, and William Shakespeare; and analyze

Shakespeare's purpose and the consequential effect of misrepresenting the king.

Background

At my site—Independence High School in East Side San Jose, a lower socioeconomic neighborhood—English is the only course required for all four years of high school: all other subjects vary in requirement from a single year, with most requiring two to three years. Students who are on-track, fluent English speakers, and mainstreamed will take English 2 during their sophomore year. This unit can be adapted for a pre-Advanced Placement classroom or be taught as a cross-curricular unit with World History, AP World History, or AP European History.

My English 2 students come from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds: 37% are Asian, 35% are Hispanic, and 20% are Filipino; the Caucasian population is officially considered statistically insignificant at just 3.5% of the total school population. 43% of our students qualify nationally for the Free/Reduced Lunch Program and a total of 53% of our students are categorized as being socio-economically disadvantaged. Finally, 19% of our students are targeted English Language Learners and 29.3% are Redesignated Fluent English Proficient having acquired the language at native speaking levels.

In 2012, my school made a 3-point gain on the Academic Performance Index (API), a measure of our school's scholastic ability and progress as part of the state's *Public Schools Accountability Act of 1999*, bringing scores from 762 to 765 (out of 1000 points and with a statewide target of 800). While this demonstrates continued, positive growth, we did not meet our overall growth target because our socio-economically disadvantaged students, an important subgroup, did not make its growth target. As such, my site remains a Program Improvement school for its sixth straight year. Equally discouraging, the Early Assessment Program for the state university level indicates that just 37% of our students are prepared for college-level English; 63% require remediation at the university level.

Despite their cultural diversity and socioeconomic disparity, all of my students agree on a few things in my mainstream English 2 classroom: Shakespeare is hard, Shakespeare is confusing, Shakespeare has nothing to do with their lives today in modern American culture, and we should just skip the Shakespeare unit for something more fun like, you know, anything else.

Your Brain on Shakespeare

But, says eager beaver, Bard-obsessed English teacher, Shakespeare is good for you. As educators—and especially educators of literature—we've always suspected that reading something for the mere reason that it is hard has value in and of itself. But now researchers at the University of Liverpool have completed a study that indicates that the human brain benefits from reading complex works from authors like William Shakespeare, Charles Dickens, William Wordsworth, and T.S. Eliot. These researchers included scientists, psychologists, and English academics. They monitored brain activity as volunteers read these difficult texts, then compared these scans against reading the same text translated, so to speak, into present-day English.

The challenging, original texts "set off far more electrical activity in the reader's brain than the more pedestrian versions." ² With the aid of electroencephalography, it was shown that the reading and interpreting of challenging texts causes both hemispheres of the brain to light up—the right, responsible for memory and emotion, as well as the left, responsible for processing language. As Phillip Davis, Professor Emeritus of Biblical Studies at the University of Sheffield, England, stated at the North of England Education Conference in January 2013, "Serious literature acts like a rocket-booster to the brain." ³ It's more than just our love for the

Bard that warrants his inclusion in our classrooms: Shakespeare's voice—his syntax, diction, figurative language, and imagery—stimulates the brain because the reader must work hard to process and comprehend Shakespeare's language.

Although our brains were not originally designed to read the printed word, we have adapted to the technology. Reading is already a highly developed neurological activity, but reading complicated texts requires the brain to "shift mental pathways, [creating] new thoughts, shapes, and connections in the young and staid alike." ⁴ Shakespeare manipulated words while English was still emerging as a world language, shifting nouns into verbs and creating new words and phrases. His use of metaphor—"He childed as I fathered" and "To lip a wanton in a secure couch/And to suppose her chaste" and "Now is the winter of our discontent/Made glorious summer by this son of York"—demands the brain's flexibility and athleticism to understand his syntax and figurative language. In short, Shakespeare makes us smarter.

Earlier, I referenced Twitter, Facebook, and SnapChat. Not only can these modern devices destroy a reputation in nanoseconds, they also might be destroying our students' ability to read and comprehend lengthy text. At the elementary and secondary level, students have become too used to reading and processing short chunks of text on small screens like smartphones and tablets. Reading 140-characters does not require the same stamina and intellectualism as reading *Richard III*: at 1689-characters, the opening soliloquy alone is more than ten times longer than an average tweet. Our classroom assignments sometimes aren't much better: literature textbooks mainly focus on the short story and the poem instead of a full play or novel, and the short passages students must parse for state exams rarely fill a page. This chunking does not challenge their brains, nor does it teach students the stamina for handling the longer prose they will need at the college level and in the working world.

The new, national Common Core State Standards indicate that, by the end of grade 10, students should be able to read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, at the high end of the grades 9–10 text complexity band independently and proficiently. Shakespeare is a natural fit for this objective.

Teaching Strategies

Length of Unit

This unit was designed for sophomore-level, high school English. A typical Shakespeare unit takes four to six weeks to complete in the high school classroom, with classes meeting daily for 54-minute periods. All reading of the text occurs in class. Writing and research may take place out of class as homework assignments, but can also be incorporated into class time.

Teaching Goals

Upon completion of this unit, students will be able to analyze how the complex character of Richard III develops over the course of the play—from subversive villain to brutal tyrant to determined soldier—through an examination of Richard's speeches and soliloquies. Additionally, students will examine Richard's interactions with other characters (especially Lady Anne, Margaret of Anjou, and Elizabeth Woodville) advances the plot and develops the themes of power, corruption, and evil. ⁵

Students will analyze how and why Shakespeare chooses how to structure the text of the play, manipulate time through pacing and flashbacks, to create tension and suspense. ⁶

Students will analyze how Shakespeare draws on and transforms source material in *Richard III*, especially considering the untruths and distortions between the fictional and historical Richard IIIs. ⁷

Students will initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9–10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively. ⁸

Students will draw evidence from literary and informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research on both historical and literary characters. ⁹

What is Biography?

The words of the biography allow the subject to live and breathe, to stay young forever, but it can also be problematic if the biographer insists on being a flatterer or a critic. Biography is a detailed, descriptive account of someone's life, generally from birth to death. Blending history and storytelling to create a compelling, intimate look at those who came before us, biography is as much a story about the history as it is a story about a person within that time period.

Biographer Hermione Lee has provided several metaphors to express the concept of biography: biography is a literary autopsy, examining the person—usually after death—to "investigate, understand, describe, and explain what may have seemed obscure, strange, or inexplicable." ¹⁰ Equally, biography is also a portrait made of words instead of paints: "portrait suggests empathy, bringing to life [and] capturing the character. The portraitist simulates warmth, energy, idiosyncrasy, and personality through attention to detail and skill in representation." ¹¹ A good biographer makes both the subject and the historical period come alive within the pages of the text.

Why Study Biography?

There are many things to consider here: why do some people become famous? Who changed our world? Who makes us think? Who inspires us to grow or to change, to become better? In studying biography, we can look at people who have made profound impacts on our world and our history. As biographer Mary Marshall stated:

Partial as biography can be, it is still the best tool for bringing a wealth of issues into play in one historical work. Biography comes as close as any genre can to capturing the sense of what it felt like to be *alive*, in all the complexity that word suggests, at an earlier time...Biography reminds us "how certain ideas that we now take utterly for granted were once dramatically new, and how the force of them hit each person one at a time." ¹²

In the classroom, teachers are forever searching for ways for students to become enthusiastic about what they read. Everything we like to read they find old, dull, and completely removed from their reality of technology and modern woes, not realizing that humanity has the same desires, the same worries, the same joys, and the same fears as we've always had: Will I fall in love? How do I fit in? What am I supposed to do? What happens next?

To begin the unit, students might consider the difference between writing one's own autobiography or

memoir, having one's best friend write the story as biography instead, having one's worst enemy commission the story, and having a neutral third-party write the story either now or a hundred years from now. Ask students: What are you going to leave behind? What will your future biographers find and how will it be interpreted? Remember, our students are documenting everything: from selfies, or photographs of themselves on a daily basis, to hourly status updates on Facebook, and multiple tweets and texts. Additionally, they might be keeping a blog or a Tumblr account in addition to the average detritus—school records, hospital records, church records—we all accumulate in modern culture.

Why Study Shakespeare as a Biographer?

Shakespeare is not usually taught as being a biographer—English teachers prefer to teach him as a playwright and poet—but his histories tell the stories of important men from an important time of England's development as a nation and empire. Shakespeare's ability to create memorable, enduring characters means that most of what modern audiences think we know about Richard III comes from Shakespeare's play. The five-centuries dead monarch is seen as a scheming, manipulative, ugly hunchback. With little surviving evidence, five hundred years' worth of audiences from around the globe have tried this man and found him guilty of treason, regicide, fratricide, infanticide, and uxoricide.

Shakespeare's plays detailed the lives of fictional and nonfictional beings: *Antony and Cleopatra*, *King Lear*, and *Macbeth* are all examples of real people that Shakespeare transformed from the source material. His attraction to writing about these men and women is clarified in *Hamlet*, in Hamlet's conversation with the First Player before the performance of *The Mousetrap*: "the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the/first and now, was and is, to hold, as 'twere, the/mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own feature,/scorn her own image, and the very age and body of/the time his form and pressure." ¹³ Shakespeare was first and foremost a storyteller, but eliminate the iambic pentameter, disregard the supernatural, pay no attention to the crowns: at their core, Shakespearean plays are about an elemental fascination what it means to be a human being.

Shakespeare's histories—of which there are ten in his oeuvre of thirty-seven plays—were a way of teaching England about its national heritage. Much as American audiences embrace films like Steven Spielberg's 2012 film *Lincoln* and Roger Mitchell's film from that same year *Hyde Park on Hudson*, Elizabethan audiences were curious about their past. Elizabethan audiences, who did not have access to a free and public education, learned about some of their more influential kings through the theatre. Shakespeare devoted a portion of his talent towards preserving the life stories of England's monarchy. Granted these stories were greatly embellished and often acted as pieces of propaganda, but they also gave the English a sense of national pride and a consciousness of their origins.

A person's biography becomes one's pathway to immortality simply because literature has the potential to last throughout the ages. As Shakespeare wrote: "So long as men can breathe and eyes can see/So long lives this and this gives life to thee." ¹⁴ While it is true that not every piece of writing can or will last—something popular today can become old-fashioned within a generation—there is always the potential of being preserved and handed down through the ages.

Shakespeare's words and works have withstood the test of time because he tapped into the classical approach of asking big question and exploring big ideas. His writing achieved immortality because he reflected upon the nature of the human condition, he examined simple truths about big concepts like love and jealousy, and because he is difficult. He challenged his audience in 1592 not because he was writing in iambics, but because he made his audience question, think, debate, and get angry. He made them smile, boo, laugh, and cry. The

human condition does not change and that is why his works have been translated into every language, performed on every continent (well, maybe not Antarctica). They are performed in Elizabethan dress and set in Elizabethan times, but they are also frequently updated into modern settings and performed in modern dress, all while retaining the beauty and poetry of the original text.

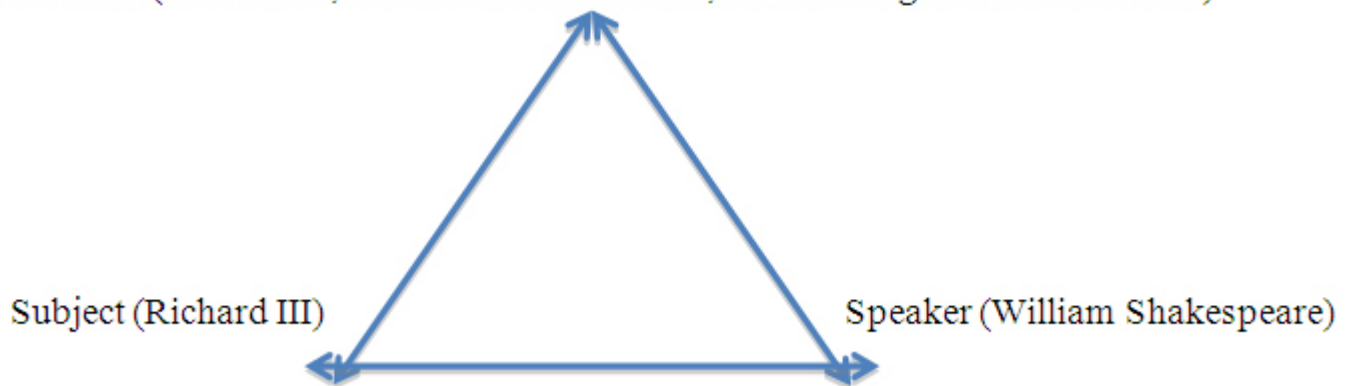
Literary Analysis: Start with SOAPStone

Once students have mastered the ability to recount simple details of a plot, it's time to move them up Bloom's Taxonomy from knowledge/comprehension towards analysis/evaluation. The SOAPStone (speaker, occasion, audience, purpose, subject, and tone) strategy provides them with the first few tools in their repertoire, providing them with something to look for and discuss.

SOAPStone is a mnemonic acronym for a series of elements that careful readers should examine as they analyze literature. ¹⁵ This strategy encourages readers to move beyond the plot and consider the speaker (not the writer, but who is telling the story?), occasion (why was this written?), audience (to whom is the piece intended? Who is supposed to read it?), purpose (what is the reason for the writing of this text?), subject (what is this piece about?), and tone (what is the attitude of the writer?) as elements that will ground the piece. It provides clarity and focuses the reader to seek evidence before interpreting the piece. In general, SOAPStone works best with short, contained pieces of text—a poem or a monologue—but for this unit, we will be applying the first triangle of the strategy—subject, audience, and speaker—to the play, saving purpose, occasion, and tone for a second layer of analysis. This will allow students to focus on the fundamental relationship between the writer, the reader, and the topic.

The First Triangle: Subject/Audience/Speaker

Audience (Elizabeth I, Elizabethan Audiences, Modern High School Students)



Relationship between Subject and Audience: Richard III and Elizabeth I

The relationship between the subject and the audience is one that is rarely questioned: I'm here to see a play; entertain me! But this relationship would be one that Shakespeare would have carefully considered and structured, considering his primary audience was always his queen; his goal with her was always to entertain and flatter.

In 1483, Elizabeth I's grandfather, Henry VII, defeated Richard III at the Battle of Bosworth Field. If this was not a justified act, it was an act of treason. And if it was an act of treason, Elizabeth I should not have been on the throne. Her ascension had already been one of great dispute: the Church, her older sister, and a sizable chunk

of England had questioned the legitimacy of both her parents' marriage and Elizabeth's birth. If Elizabeth I's claim were rightful, then Richard's claim must have been wrongful. The wrong king on the throne was disastrous, so Henry VII, through the Divine Right of Kings, vanquished the evil from the land, decisively ended the War of the Roses, restored England to peace, and ushered in the prosperous Tudor Dynasty culminating in the righteous reign of Elizabeth I.

Relationship between Subject and Audience: Richard III and Elizabethan Audiences

At best, the vast majority of the Elizabethan audience was undereducated. The Anglican Church provided a means to improve literacy by translating the Bible and the Mass from Latin into Common English, but it did not teach its population to question. Indeed, questioning authority usually led to trouble, imprisonment, and execution. Therefore, most Elizabethans would not question or critique a play that served to maintain the popular propaganda. Written over 100 years after the death of Richard III, there would have been no remaining witnesses to the actual reign of the king, no one to stand up for his character and suggest that the representation of the former monarch was flat or one-sided.

Besides the Church, another avenue of educating a large populace was through theater. Greece had done so in the Golden Age; the Catholic Church continued the tradition in the Middle Ages. The five-act play provided an opportunity to teach Elizabethan audiences morality, spirituality, and what history they should unquestioningly accept and embrace. In the case of Richard III, the oversimplified history taught England that the Tudors were good, the Yorks were bad; Henry VII was a hero, Richard III was a demon bent on destroying England. Richard III needed to be seen as the bad guy, not only to appease Elizabeth I, but to satisfy the original 1592 audience of this play.

Relationship between Subject and Audience: Richard III and High School Students

Why should students care about a long-dead king who ruled for two years in a country thousands of miles away? The 2012 discovery of the gravesite gives educators a hook: two-year hunt might appeal to a sense of mystery and intrigue, the twisted remains to a sense of the macabre.

But it might also be a sense of injustice that grabs hold of students' attention. My unit for *Richard III* typically follows a unit on Sophocles' *Antigone*, which deals with a body that is left unburied. While Richard III's body was given burial, he was only granted the barest minimum of dignity. His legacy, on the other hand, wasn't even afforded that much. Scholars, historians, and a certain playwright distorted the truth and trashed a man's reputation. Modern audiences are intrigued by Richard's cruelty—he's not too different from Muammar Gaddafi or Idi Amin. Perhaps not as worldly yet, modern students are intrigued by Richard III's manipulation of people, the media, and emotions. *Richard III* is an incredibly accessible play because of the soliloquies, allowing the audience to become, in a sense, his confidante. He tells us everything he's going to do—

"And therefore, — since I cannot prove a lover,/To entertain these fair well-spoken days, —/I am determined to prove a villain,/And hate the idle pleasures of these days," commits these heinous crimes, and then turns right back to us almost as if to gloat, and then later unburden himself.¹⁶ Students can easily be drawn into that relationship and enjoy the exploration.

Relationship between Audience and Speaker: Elizabeth I and William Shakespeare

Elizabeth I was an absolute monarch with ultimate, unquestioned control over her kingdom. This not only extended over land and sea, but reached into every theater and artist's residence. Her approval of

Shakespeare's subject matter and treatment was required for his ability to work, regardless of whether or not she would ever see the play performed.

A writer in her own right, she enjoyed poetry and theater, Shakespeare being a favorite if evidenced by the fact that she "[attended] the very first performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*." ¹⁷ Like Shakespeare, Elizabeth I was a student "of the ancient classical period; she used her influence in the progress of the English drama, and fostered the inimitable genius of Shakespeare. In regard to her taste for the ancient stage, Sir Roger Naunton tells us 'That the great Queen translated one of the tragedies of Euripides from the original Greek for her amusement.'" ¹⁸ When *Richard III* first premiered in 1592, Elizabeth I had been on the throne for thirty-four years. Though she did not visit public theaters, Shakespeare would have had no choice but to honor and flatter his queen if he expected her approval, her protection, and her patronage.

Shakespeare would have used the approved history of the Tudor claim to the throne. Since history is written by the victors, Shakespeare built his play on the version of events that made Henry VII, Elizabeth's grandfather the righteous winner at the Battle of Bosworth and the rightful heir to England's throne. Knowingly or unwittingly, Shakespeare built upon an accepted history to create what would become enduring propaganda for the Tudors.

Relationship between Audience and Speaker: High School Students and Shakespeare

Modern students have difficulty with Shakespeare's oft-invented words, with his iambs, with his use of the soliloquy. The challenge is getting students to see their connection to a 450-year old writer and their own, modern lives. Students see Shakespeare's style as Old English instead of Modern (differentiated from Present Day) English. American high school students distance themselves further by seeing nothing of interest in stories about English kings.

But even in the histories, Shakespeare was not merely exploring the monarchy; he was examining questions of power, loyalty, and legacy. All of these are big, essential questions for any generation, any culture. These are some of the reasons why Shakespeare's plays have endured for five centuries. Students understand the desire for power, they seek loyalty from their circle of friends, and they are beginning to wonder how they will be remembered.

Relationship between Speaker and Subject: Shakespeare and Richard III

A lot of what modern audiences think they know about Richard III comes from William Shakespeare. This play endured and is vastly more accessible than researching actual historical evidence, especially since much of the original evidence—the gravesite, undoctored portraits—was either destroyed by Tudor supporters or lost to time. Shakespeare added to the popular propaganda by creating an evil king: a hunchback with a withered arm who had spent two years in his mother's womb, who wooed his wife over the bleeding corpse of a man he helped kill, and who had orchestrated the execution of his brother in the Tower, the murders of his own nephews to secure the throne, and the suspiciously timed death of his wife, Lady Anne.

Shakespeare created an archetypal villain: the cockatrice without conscience, the monster who craved unquestioned power, the man with an unnatural relationship with his family. What Shakespeare did not do is create a forgettable character. At turns funny, charming, and fearless, Shakespeare's version of Richard III is neither easily-ignored nor easily-dismissed. In turn, he constructed a history that quickly became an accepted version of truth.

Classroom Activities

Interactive Notebooks

Students are required to keep an interactive notebook in my English class. Interactive notebooks are basic, spiral-bound notebooks that teach students how to organize and interact with text. When opened and spread out, an interactive notebook has a left-hand side (the backside of the previous page) and a right-hand side. Teacher handouts, classroom notes, vocabulary words are put onto the right-hand side (the teacher is always right!) while student activities—including doodles, responses, journal activities—are maintained on the left-hand.

Reader's Theater

It is encouraged to have students read the play out loud, in class and with the benefit of the teacher, in a modified reader's theater. The teacher might begin with a few props to help the class remember who each character is: a crown to be passed around as king succeeds king, black veils for the widowed queens, daggers for the murderers, a Bible for the bishop, a prisoner's badge for Clarence. Switch readers daily to allow a balance for stronger readers and an opportunity to practice for weaker reading.

Syllabus

Week 1: Begin the Shakespeare Unit.

Who was William Shakespeare? Where did he come from and how did he become a writer? Why do modern audience still appreciate Shakespeare's work? Who was the real Richard III? Who was Queen Elizabeth I?

Start with the unwritten word: pictures and portraits. For this unit, I would start with a photograph of Richard's exhumed skeleton found in Leicester, England, in 2013, readily available on the internet. I'll ask them what they see and what inferences they can make from the bones—the crooked spine, the age of the skull—as well as the fact that it was dug up in a car park—lost and ignored for 535 years.

The next set of images I provide are official portraits of Richard III, Elizabeth I, and William Shakespeare without identifying the subjects. Look for portraits of younger and older versions of themselves. Search the National Gallery of England for portraits of Elizabeth and Richard: I'm partial to a portrait of Elizabeth I by Nicholas Hilliard, an oil on panel, circa 1575, that currently hangs in the Tate Britain in London, which shows an older queen.

The BBC website has also created a picture gallery for Richard III that gives various interpretations of what he looked like and how the portraits were later altered when the Yorks became the disgraced royal family.

For Shakespeare, I am quite fond of the so-called new or Cobbe portrait of William Shakespeare, only authenticated in 2009. This is believed to be the only portrait actually made of William Shakespeare while he was alive (all others are believed to be posthumously commissioned and executed).¹⁹ This portrait shows a confident man, perhaps approaching middle age but at the height of his power and his success as a writer, well dressed in doublet and ruff.

After selecting a sampling of portraits, have students work in small groups to discuss what they see in the

portraits, listing facts and then making inferences. For example, Shakespeare's clothing suggest he was wealthy, but of the middle class. Elizabeth's ornate clothing could lead them to infer that she is wealthy. Many of Elizabeth's portraits are also rich in symbolism—roses, prayer books, and pearls—if you should choose to examine that aspect as well. Have students present their findings to each other informally, and then display the portraits on the wall for the remainder of the unit.

Continue with building on previous knowledge— many students will have read *Romeo and Juliet* in 9th grade; some might have had some exposure to one of the comedies in junior high. Start students on researching in groups: 1 group takes on each of the historical characters we've worked with: Richard III, Elizabeth I, and William Shakespeare. A quick and dirty research session online could even suffice, everything the student groups can find out about their subject in 10 minutes, reporting back to class in an informal presentation. Round out their information with video clips and pictures.

Suggested resources for Richard III: official portraits of Richard III; film clips from *Looking for Richard* (1996), BBC's *Richard III* (1983), McKellen's *Richard III* (1995), 2013 photographs of Richard III's skeleton.

Suggested resources for Queen Elizabeth I: excerpt from *Orlando* by Virginia Woolf (text or film); official portraits of Queen Elizabeth I; film clips from *Shakespeare in Love*, *Elizabeth* (1997), *Elizabeth I* (2005), *The Virgin Queen* (2006), and/or *Elizabeth: The Golden Age* (2007).

Suggested resources for William Shakespeare: The Cobbe portrait, film clips from *Shakespeare in Love* (1998), *Being Shakespeare* (2011).

Finally, provide students with a family tree, a visual representation of The Yorks and The Lancasters (and The Tudors). There are a lot of Richards (not just Richard III also referred to as Duke of Gloucester before he is crowned, but also Richard Duke of York, the young son of Edward IV and Elizabeth Woodville), Edwards (Anne's husband was an Edward, as is Richard's oldest brother and Richard's nephew), Henrys (Henry VI and Henry VI), and Elizabeths (both Edward IV's wife and daughter are named Elizabeth) to keep straight. Anything that helps students visually organize the information will be greatly beneficial.

Conclude the introductory week of the unit with smaller chunks of Shakespearean text—a few sonnets, a pair of soliloquies, maybe a monologue or two. Build on previous knowledge—students can create a KWL (Know | Want | Learn) chart.

End the week by closely examining Richard's opening soliloquy focusing on Subject/Audience/Speaker, then extending to Occasion/Purpose/Tone.

Week 2: What is power? What is evil?

Begin with reading the play using modified reader's theater. As with all reading, chunk the text and frequently check for understanding. Keep returning to Subject/Audience/Speaker, then extending to Occasion/Purpose/Tone, especially with the soliloquies and monologues.

Supplement the reading with video clips and the Internet. Sir Ian McKellen, in collaboration with the Royal National Theatre, has a fantastic website that shows three distinct visions of the opening soliloquy, as well as having Sir Ian lead the viewer through an interpretation of the text.²⁰ Ask students if they can think of a fourth vision for the play much like Baz Luhrmann did with reimagining *Romeo and Juliet* into a contemporary, American setting in 1996 or Richard Loncrain did by placing *Richard III* into a vaguely familiar, fascist 20th

Century setting.

Week 3: What roles have women been playing in this play?

Continue reading the play, supplementing video clips as wanted or needed. In addition to a straightforward version of the play (currently available on film: Lawrence Olivier's 1955 movie, the BBC's 1983 filmed play, Loncrain's 1995 movie), teachers might want to consider using excerpts from *Looking for Richard* and *Being Shakespeare*.

Week 4: What is the connection between the ruler and the state?

Continue reading the play. When you get to 3.7, when Richard fakes his humble piety and conspires with Buckingham in order to have the Lord Mayor beg Richard to be the king, check out Stagemwork's website which shows this scene from three different points of view: Richard's, the audience's, and the Lord Mayor's. ²¹

Week 5: What is the power of language?

Conclude reading the play. Once Richard III has possession of the crown in 4.2, show the Histories skit from *The Reduced Shakespeare Company: the Complete Works of William Shakespeare (Abridged!)* DVD; it will make the crown-as-football metaphor make more sense.

Week 6: Wrap it up

What are the themes in *Richard III*? Is *Richard III* better classified as a tragedy or a history? Does fictional Richard get what he deserves in the play? Does historical Richard get what he deserves by having this play pervade and persist? What does Shakespeare have to say about our human desire for power and control? Why has Shakespeare's work survived through the ages? What does the play say to modern audiences about the human condition or the human experience? Remember to complete the KWL chart started at the beginning of the unit, especially the "L" column. Ask students if they still have unanswered questions from the "W" column.

Extension or Extra Credit:

It is believed that, upon his death, Richard's naked body was brought back for public display, and then given burial at the Grey Friars in Leicester. "An alabaster tomb was erected over the grave [on order of his vanquisher, Henry VII, in 1495]. The friary was dissolved by King Henry VIII [in 1538] and most of the buildings were demolished soon after." ²² While Richard III was never forgotten by history, an unmarked grave quickly becomes lost. There was a belief that the body had been dug up and tossed into a river, but that story could never be proven or disproven.

In the summer of 2012, a team of archeologists, historians, and royal enthusiasts excavated a car park in Leicester, found the foundations of the old friary, and, most importantly, uncovered a skeleton with a distinctly curved spine. The skeleton seemed to have been buried with little regard or care.

The body appears to have been placed in the grave with minimal reverence. Although the lower limbs are fully extended and the hands lay on the pelvis, the torso is twisted to the north and the head, abnormally, is propped up against the north-west corner of the grave [...] an untidy lozenge shape with a concave base and sloping sides, leaving the bottom of the grave much smaller than its extent at ground level [...] Only a little extra effort by the grave-diggers to tidy the grave ends would have made this grave long enough to receive the body conventionally. That they did not,

instead placing the body on one side of the grave, its torso crammed against the northern side, may suggest haste or little respect for the deceased. ²³

It took months of testing, but the physical evidence of the spine curvature, the wounds, and, finally, the DNA evidence conclusively proved that this was the skeleton of King Richard III; the centuries-long mystery was finally solved. A two-hour documentary titled *Richard III: The King in the Car Park* details the exhaustive search for the bones, the testing, and the official announcement.

Final question: Should *Richard III* be reclassified as a Shakespearean tragedy in the vein of *King Lear* or *Macbeth*—two other works based on British history—now that historical evidence show it as a work of historical fiction rather than history?

Teacher Resources

Activity 1: SOAPSTone Strategy and Shakespeare's Voice and Style

SOAPSTone is a mnemonic acronym for a series of elements that students should examine as they begin to analyze literature. ²⁴ Students consider the speaker (not the writer, but who is telling the story?), occasion (why was this written?), audience (to whom is the piece intended? Who is supposed to read it?), purpose (what is the reason for the writing of this text?), subject (what is this piece about?), and tone (what is the attitude of the writer?) as elements that will ground the piece. It provides clarity and focuses the student to seek evidence before interpreting the piece.

There are two pieces I recommend on a Shakespeare-as-biographer unit: Sonnet CXXX ("My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun") and the "All the World's a Stage" monologue from *As You Like It*. For all examples of close-examination of text, it is ideal to provide a handout that students can write on. Handouts should also have line numbers so that students can easily find their way around and so that they can begin to learn how to cite Shakespearean text.

Part 1: In Sonnet CXXX, Shakespeare writes about his mistress by satirizing the conventions of the sonnet. Should the assignment need to be increased in difficulty, this sonnet pairs well with Sonnet XVIII ("Shall I Compare Thee to a Summer's Day").

After reviewing the basic elements of a sonnet and ensuring students understand the basic vocabulary, guide the students in a SOAPSTone, determining the speaker (a man with a mistress), occasion (describing his mistress), audience (a friend), purpose (describing his lover, breaking the mold of the sonnet form, subverting the cliché of comparing a woman to nature), subject (the mistress, perhaps the Dark Lady), and tone (satirical, romantic, mocking, loving). Continue with a discussion about having this as the woman's legacy. The mysterious, unnamed mistress has probably been dead for over 400 years, yet this remains. Is the speaker being cruel? Is she really all that ugly? Does he love her?

Part 2: In the "All the World's a Stage," Shakespeare compares the lifespan of man to a seven-act play, infancy through old age. This monologue from *As You Like It* touches on what we know because of our parents or our grandparents—slowly aging, slowly dying. It is a common experience that Shakespeare explored: what it meant to be human, to just be. It is "the common lot of human kind and nobody ever found better words for it

than William Shakespeare." 25

Guide the students through a SOAPStone discussion, but begin to bridge the extended metaphor that life is like a play and life stories are often turned into entertainment for others.

Activity 2: The Winter of Our Discontent

Richard III opens on a soliloquy, the protagonist reveals his inner thoughts and establishes the setting of the play by detailing recent events: England has recently concluded and England has changed from a nation at war to a nation at peace. Richard tells us what he thinks about himself, reflecting on his physical ugliness and his inability, in his estimation, to form a romantic attachment. He then reveals his intentions and ambitions for the balance of the play: since he cannot be the lover or the hero, he will be the villain and master puppeteer, controlling the situation for his own amusement and, eventually, his own profit.

Guide the students through a SOAPStone analysis, then begin a discussion on how this opening soliloquy reveals Shakespeare uses elements such as figurative language, imagery, and tone to develop this first impression of Richard the anti-hero.

Activity 3: Compare and Contrast Historical to Fictional Richard III

Using the following table, discuss the physical appearance of Richard III from historical documents and compare them to quotes from the two Shakespearean plays that include Richard as a character. Why does Shakespeare exaggerate the physicality of the character? Would it have been more or less effective if Richard had looked more accurate to his historical counterpart, or even completely normal? Have students discuss why appearance is part of characterization.

Historical Richard III	Fictional Richard III
<p>"Of bodily shape comely enough, only of low stature". John Stow, Quoting men who knew Richard, 1592</p> <p>"[T]hree fingers taller than myself...also much more lean; he had delicate arms and legs, also a great heart..." - Nicholas von Poppelau, Diary, 1484</p> <p>"Now I look for the first time upon your face, it is the countenance worthy of the highest power and kingliness, illuminated by moral and heroic virtue...never before has nature dared to encase in a smaller body such spirit and strength". - Archibald Whitelaw</p> <p>"[T]his is that very noble prince, the special patron of knightly prowess, which as well in all princely behavior, as in lineaments and favor of his visage, represents the very face of the noble Duke of York his father..." - Sir Thomas More, Quoting Dr. Shaa</p> <p>"(Richard was) hard favoured of visage, and suche as in states called warlye, in other menne otherwise". - Sir Thomas More Historian, 1513</p> <p>"One of these is the honest John Stow, who could not flatter and speak dishonestly, and who was a man very diligent and much inquisitive to uncover all things concerning the affairs or words or persons of princes. And he was very curious in (his)</p>	<p>Why, love forswore me in my mother's womb;/And, for I should not deal in her soft laws,/She did corrupt frail nature with some bribe,/To shrink mine arm up like a wither'd shrub;/To make an envious mountain on my back;/Where sits deformity to mock my body;/To shape my legs of an unequal size;/To disproportion me in every part,/Like to a chaos, or an unlick'd bear-whelp/That carries no impression like the dam. (Richard III, <i>Henry VI part 3</i>, 3.2)</p> <p>The owl shriek'd at thy birth,--an evil sign;/The night-crow cried, aboding luckless time;/Dogs howl'd, and hideous tempest shook down trees;/The raven rook'd her on the chimney's top;/And chattering pies in dismal discords sung./Thy mother felt more than a mother's pain,/And, yet brought forth less than a mother's hope,/To wit, an indigested and deformed lump,/Not like the fruit of such a goodly tree./Teeth hadst thou in thy head when thou wast born,/To signify thou camest to bite the world. (Henry VI, <i>Henry VI part 3</i>, 5.6)</p> <p>"I, that am curtail'd of this fair proportion,/Cheated of feature by dissembling nature/Deformed, unfinish'd, 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." (Richard III, <i>Richard III</i>, 1.1)</p>

<p>description of their forms, their favours, and of all the lineaments of their bodies...And further, he said that he had spoken with old and grave men who had often seen King Richard, and that they affirmed that he was...of person and bodily shape comely enough, but they said that he was very low of stature." - Sir George Buck, Quoting John Stow, 1619</p>	<p>"Behold, mine arm/Is like a blasted sapling, withered up." (Richard, <i>Richard III</i>, 3.4)</p>
---	--

Finally, retell the story of the speech in a series of 7 mini-posters (8x11") to form a graphic novel about the birth of Richard III. This assignment can be extended for an advanced classroom by finding more information about the historical Richard III, information that is readily available on the Internet.

Appendix

Works Cited

Brown, Henry. *Shakespeare's Patrons & Other Essays*. London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1912.

Brown, Mark. "A New View: Is This the Real Shakespeare?" *The Guardian*.
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture/2009/mar/10/shakespeare-cobbe-portrait> (accessed July 12, 2013)

Buckley, Richard, Matthew Morris, Jo Appleby, Turi King, Deirdre O'Sullivan, and Lin Foxhall. "The King in the Car Park': New Light on the Death and Burial of Richard III in the Grey Friars Church, Leicester, in 1485." *Antiquity Journal*.
<http://antiquity.ac.uk/ant/087/ant0870519.htm> (accessed July 14, 2013).

Cavendish, Richard. "The Birth of Richard III." *History Today*. <http://www.historytoday.com/richard-cavendish/birth-richard-iii> (accessed June 28, 2013).

"Common Core State Standards Initiative." *Common Core State Standards*. National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, Washington D.C., n.d. Web. 11 July 2013. .

Eliot, T. S. "Tradition and the Individual Talent." T.S. Eliot. 1921. *The Sacred Wood*;

Essays on Poetry and Criticism. Great Books Online. <http://www.bartleby.com/200/sw4.html> (accessed July 13, 2013).

Guerin, Wilfred L. *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature*. 4th ed. New York:

Oxford University Press, 1999. Print.

Henry, Julie. "Shakespeare and Wordsworth Boost the Brain, New Research Reveals."

The Telegraph. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/science/science-news/9797617/Shakespeare-and-Wordsworth-boost-the-brain-new-research-reveals.html> (accessed June 28, 2013).

Lee, Hermione. *Biography: a Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Marshall, Megan. "Common-Place: Ask the Author." *Common-Place*. <http://www.common-place.org/vol-08/no-01/author/> (accessed July 12, 2013).

Moorhen, Wendy E. A. "Richard III: A Brief Biography and Introduction to Richard's Reputation." *Richard III Society*.
http://www.richardiii.net/2_1_0_richardiii.php#perfect (accessed July 13, 2013)

Morse, Ogden. "SOAPStone: A Strategy for Reading *and* Writing." *AP Central*.
http://apcentral.collegeboard.com/apc/public/preap/teachers_corner/45200.html (accessed July 12, 2013)

Nigol, Rick. "Combatting "Twitter Brain" Syndrome." *The Horizon: Desire2Learn Website*.
<http://www.desire2learn.com/newsletters/Horizon/Issue28/articles/?id=2> (accessed July 10, 2013).

Priesnitz, Wendy. "Will Computers Warp Their Brains?" *Life Learning Magazine*, Jan. - Feb. 2012.
<http://www.lifeflearningmagazine.com/1202/LifeLearningJanFeb12.pdf> (accessed July 10, 2013).

Richards, Jeffery. "The Riddle of Richard III." History Today. <http://www.historytoday.com/jeffrey-richards/riddle-richard-iii> (accessed June 28, 2013).

Shapiro, James S. *A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare, 1599*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2005.

Stone, Dr. Philip. "Where Does Skeleton Revelation Leave Legend of Richard III?" CNN.com. <http://www.cnn.com/2013/02/04/opinion/richard-iii-phil-stone-oped/index.html> (accessed July 14, 2013).

The Official Website of the British Monarchy. "Elizabeth I." www.royal.gov.uk/historyofthemonarchy/kingsandqueensofengland/thetudors/elizabethi.aspx (accessed July 12, 2013).

The Reader. "The Power of Poetry: How Serious Literature Can Boost the Brain." The Reader Online. <http://thereaderonline.co.uk/2013/01/14/the-power-of-poetry-how-serious-literature-can-boost-the-brain/> (accessed June 28, 2013).

The Richard III Foundation, Inc. "What History Has to Say about Richard III." Loyal to the Truth. http://www.richard111.com/what_history_has_to_say_about_ri.htm (accessed July 14, 2013).

Woolf, Virginia, Maria DiBattista, and Mark Hussey. "Chapter One." In *Orlando: a Biography*. Annotated ed., 1st ed. Orlando: Harcourt, 2006. 17.

Student Resources

Shakespeare, William. *Richard III*. Washington Square Press New Folger's ed. New York: Pocket Books, 1996.

The Royal National Theatre. "A Conversation with Sir Ian McKellen." Stagemwork.org. <http://www.stagemwork.org.uk/mckellen/index.htm> (accessed July 11, 2013).

The Royal National Theatre. "Richard III." Stagemwork.org. <http://www.stagemwork.org.uk/webdav/harmonisePage%252Fid=6004&Section%252Fid=1170.html> (accessed July 11, 2013).

Teaching Materials

Being Shakespeare. DVD. Directed by Jonathan Bate. London: Illuminations, 2012.

International Reading Association. "I Am Poem." ReadWriteThink.org. www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/lesson_images/lesson391/i-am-poem.pdf (accessed July 12, 2013)

Looking for Richard. Film. Directed by Penelope Allen. Beverly Hills, Calif.: Fox Video, 1996.

Richard III. DVD. Directed by Richard Loncraine. Santa Monica, CA: MGM Home Entertainment Inc., 1995.

Richard III: The King in the Car Park. DVD. Directed by Louise Osmond. London: Dazzler Media, 2013.

The Reduced Shakespeare Company: the Complete Works of William Shakespeare (Abridged!). DVD. Directed by Paul Kafno. Silver Spring, Md.: Acorn Media, 2000.

Reynolds, Peter. *Practical Approaches to Teaching Shakespeare*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991.

Notes

1. Shapiro, *The Year of Shakespeare: 1599*, 123.
2. Henry, "Shakespeare and Wordsworth Boost the Brain, New Research Reveals."
3. The Reader, "The Power of Poetry: How Serious Literature Can Boost the Brain."
4. *ibid*
5. Common Core State Standards, English Language Arts, Reading: Literature, Grades 9-10, Standard 3.
6. Common Core State Standards, English Language Arts, Reading: Literature, Grades 9-10, Standard 5.
7. Common Core State Standards, English Language Arts, Reading: Literature, Grades 9-10, Standard 9.
8. Common Core State Standards, English Language Arts, Speaking & Listening, Grades 9-10, Standard 1.
9. Common Core State Standards, English Language Arts, Writing, Grades 9-10, Standard 9.
10. Lee, *Biography: A Very Short Introduction*, 1.
11. *ibid*, 2.
12. Marshall, "Why Biography?"
13. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 3.2.
14. Shakespeare, Sonnet XVIII.
15. Morse, "SOAPSTone: A Strategy for Reading *and* Writing."
16. Shakespeare, Richard III, 1.1.28-31
17. The Official Website of the British Monarchy, "Elizabeth I."
18. Brown, *Shakespeare's patrons & other essays*
19. Brown, "A New View: Is This the Real Shakespeare?"
20. The Royal National Theatre, Stageworks.org, "A Conversation with Ian McKellen."
21. The Royal National Theatre, Stageworks.org, "Richard III."
22. Buckley et al. "'The King in the Car Park': New Light on the Death and Burial of Richard III in the Grey Friars Church, Leicester, in 1485."
23. *ibid*
24. Morse, "SOAPSTone: A Strategy for Reading *and* Writing."

25. *Being Shakespeare*, DVD.

<https://teachers.yale.edu>

©2023 by the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute, Yale University, All Rights Reserved. Yale National Initiative®, Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute®, On Common Ground®, and League of Teachers Institutes® are registered trademarks of Yale University.

For terms of use visit https://teachers.yale.edu/terms_of_use