

# RICHARD III

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Michael Boyd's production of *Richard III* was performed by the RSC's first long ensemble Geoffrey Streatfeild, who played Lord Rivers in the production, described his experience of working as part of this ensemble: "The equal creative importance placed on each of us makes the rehearsal room buzz with unparalleled commitment... It gives us increased familiarity and working knowledge of Shakespeare's verse, our stage and each other. This highly-evolved relationship between ourselves and the material is all you could ever wish for onstage."

The ideas in this pack for working together on *Richard III* are drawn directly from the rehearsal room, and are rooted in the idea of using the text as spoken word, with the group working as actors.



Divide the players into three equal-sized groups. Give each group the list of facts on page 4. Ask the players to discuss which of these facts the audience needs to be aware of at the opening of the play, and why.

Ask the players to select three of these facts, and to choose one person who will read them out to the audience. The rest of the players in that group must make a still image (or freeze-frame), which will show the audience what they need to know for each fact. Ask each group to perform their images for the rest of the class.

What and how does each group's work signal to the audience what this play will be about? Discuss with the groups.

You may then wish to stage to investigate the soliloquy that opens the play using the activity below.



Assistant Director Donnacadh O'Briain gives us an insight into the rehearsal process for this speech:

"In rehearsal, we tried all sorts of different things. Before the speech even starts, we had a whole company sequence originally that was a birthday party for young Edward. In this sequence, Richard took one of the party helium balloons and inhaled the gas so that his voice was comic falsetto at one point. At another point, Richard handed a dagger to the boy as a present. The paper crown worked well in the party scenario, but it was a motif used across the previous three parts of Henry VI. It has been used throughout to symbolise the passing on of false royalty, an heirloom that is fragile and easily destroyed."



Divide your group into three:

- Give Group One lines 1-13 of the opening soliloquy, where Richard describes the change from war to peace under the House of York, now his brother Edward is on the throne.
- Give Group Two lines 14-27, where Richard describes himself.
- Give Group Three lines 28-41, where Richard reveals his plans to achieve power.

Explain that each group will be producing images to go with the words. Ask each group to choose a narrator. This person will use the lines as a voice-over. The rest of the group will make images with their bodies and faces that will go with the voice-over.

- Group One: Their job is to produce an advert for the House of York, making a series of five images which show what has changed and how much better things are now peace can be enjoyed under the new regime ruled by Edward.
- Group Two: Their job is to produce a series of five images taken from home video clips of Richard's childhood and private life. Each image should show Richard and other people's attitudes towards him according to what he describes.
- Group Three: Their job is to produce a series of five images taken from a spy surveillance camera which shows what Richard has done so far to forward his plans, and what might happen to Clarence because of Richard's plotting.

When the groups have their five images, ask them to find a way of moving from one to the other so they will work as a silent film that tells the story of what Richard is saying. Now ask the groups to pin-point exactly what tone and mood the narrator should try to convey through the words: should the voice-over be sinister? Joyful? Soothing? Disturbing?

Now ask the groups to perform their work for the rest of the group. Ask the audience what we discover about Richard's character. Do we like him or not? If we are sympathetic to him, why? What is it in what he says and how he says it that makes us interested in him and his plans?

For homework, ask the pupils to find music that could be played as background to the words and images, which would emphasise and make more explicit the mood they are trying to convey.

# THE OPENING OF RICHARD III – FACT LIST

- ✿ There have been battles between the House of Lancaster and the House of York – the War Of The Roses. The House of York has won, lead by Edward, Richard's brother.
- ✿ Edward has been crowned as the new king, with his wife Elizabeth as his queen.
- ✿ Richard has fought bravely for the Yorkists.
- ✿ Richard and Edward have a third brother, George, Duke of Clarence. During the War Of The Roses, he has fought against his brothers for the Lancastrians because he disapproves of Edward's wife Elizabeth. She is not of royal blood, and Clarence feels she will make an unsuitable queen. However, Clarence has been reconciled with his brother Edward.
- ✿ Richard has killed the old Lancastrian king Henry VI who was held prisoner in the Tower of London.
- ✿ The new King Edward has three children: Princess Elizabeth, Prince Edward and Prince Richard. Prince Edward, the eldest son, is the heir to the throne.



In Michael Boyd's 2007 production, Act 4 opened with the coronation of Richard. Shakespeare's stage direction is very sparse:

*London: the palace. Trumpets sound. Enter RICHARD, newly crowned as King. Attending him, BUCKINGHAM, CATESBY, RATCLIFFE and LOVELL, with a boy PAGE, and others.*

From these tiny clues, any company staging this scene must decide how the characters enter the stage. In rehearsal, the RSC Histories company discovered that they would like to see the coronation through Richard's increasingly paranoid eyes. So, the actual people who could be present at the coronation were assembled: including Richard's mother and his brother Clarence's children (all the surviving members of the royal family). Then, the ghosts of those with whom Richard has a violent murderous connection join the assembly: including Anne's father, the Earl of Warwick, Richard's brothers and Henry VI. Richard is crowned by his own father, the only person in his life with whom he has had a pure relationship. As the crowd cries "God save King Richard", the ghost of Henry VI turns to face Richard, and then cartwheels upstage in a physical attack. As Richard says, "Stand all apart", the rest of the company disperse and then walk in slow motion around the throne where Richard sits to speak with Buckingham.

Julius D'Silva, who played Catesby in this production and is understudying Richard, devised the exercise on the following page, drawn directly from his experience rehearsing the scene.



- Ask the players to walk around the room with energy and purpose, without interacting, but aware of their surroundings. Ask them to explore the space, changing direction, making sure they visit all of the space.
- Explain that you will call out a number from 1 to 10 to indicate how fast they should move, with 10 being the fastest. As leader, join in the movement and continue, calling out numbers. After a few minutes, change down to 2 or 1 speed.
- As they continue to walk, ask them to become aware of each other. Then ask them to become aware of how close the other players are. Whenever they feel that someone is too close to them, they should make a deliberate turn away from that person.
- Now ask the players to imagine that the other players are watching them. They should continue to walk around the room, but be aware of others' eyes on them at all times.

- After the Speedometer activity, ask the players to form two lines kneeling down, facing each other. Place a chair, raised on a platform if possible, at the head of the lines, and ask for two volunteers to read the scene between Richard and Buckingham on page 7. Richard sits in the chair, Buckingham comes to stand by his side when called.
- Ask 'Richard' to give the first instruction, "Stand all apart!" and then wait until the other players stand and walk away before calling Buckingham to speak with him. Ask the rest of the players to walk around, as before, retaining the sense that they are being watched. Run through this sequence.
- Now ask a volunteer to start the sequence by calling: "God save King Richard, of that name the third!" and ask the rest of the players to repeat the line. Ask the players to walk around the room as before but this time in **slow motion**, all the time retaining the sense that they are being watched. Run through the sequence again.
- Discuss with the whole group how they felt during the scene. Did they find themselves listening to Richard and Buckingham? How did they feel about 'overhearing' this conversation? What are the risks in the characters overhearing Richard's request? Were Richard and Buckingham aware of the others? Were there any lines that felt particularly significant when in this public setting?
- Swap the players reading Richard and Buckingham at this point if you wish. Ask half the group to move to the side and become the audience.
- Now ask the players to freeze on the word 'dead' in the line, "Shall I be plain, I wish the bastards dead!" They should stay frozen until Buckingham leaves the scene, when they can move again. Even when frozen, they should retain the sense that they are being watched. Run through the sequence.
- Discuss with the whole group how the freeze affects the atmosphere in the room. Which words stand out? Does the sudden stillness add anything?
- Swap over so that the other half of the group becomes the audience.
- As a final layer, choose some ambient music to play under the scene from the line, "God save King Richard!" (The music should be simple and unobtrusive yet lend a mood of tension. Try using a single woodwind instrument.) Run through the sequence, stopping the music immediately when the players freeze, and listen to Richard and Buckingham. Discuss with the players how the music affects the scene.

# ACT 4 SCENE 2 – EXTRACT

*London: the palace. Trumpets sound. Enter RICHARD, newly crowned as King. Attending him, BUCKINGHAM, CATESBY, RATCLIFFE and LOVELL, with a boy PAGE, and others.*

**Richard** Stand all apart! Cousin of Buckingham!

**Buckingham** My gracious sovereign?

**Richard** Give me thy hand. Thus high, by thy advice  
And thy assistance is King Richard seated.  
But shall we wear these glories for a day? –  
Or shall they last, and we rejoice in them?

**Buckingham** Still live they, and forever let them last!

**Richard** Ah, Buckingham, now do I play the touch,  
To try if thou be current gold indeed.  
Young Edward lives; think now what I would speak.

**Buckingham** Say on, my loving lord.

**Richard** Why, Buckingham – I say I would be King.

**Buckingham** Why, so you are, my thrice-renowned lord.

**Richard** Ha! Am I King? 'Tis so – but Edward lives.

**Buckingham** True, noble Prince.

**Richard** O bitter consequence! That Edward still should live –  
'true noble Prince!' Cousin, thou wast not wont to be so dull.  
Shall I be plain? I wish the bastards dead!  
What say'st thou now? Speak suddenly, be brief.

**Buckingham** Your Grace may do your pleasure.

**Richard** Tut, tut, thou art all ice. Thy kindness freezes.  
Say, have I thy consent that they shall die?

**Buckingham** Give me some little breath, some pause, dear lord,  
Before I positively speak in this.  
I will resolve you herein presently.

*Exit BUCKINGHAM*