

Key Stage 3 Shakespeare

Henry V

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(SAMPLE PAGES)



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Act 1

Summary

- The Bishops of Canterbury and Ely discuss Parliament's proposed transfer of much of the Church's wealth to the Crown.
- They compare Henry V's wild behaviour before he came to the throne with his responsible attitude since his coronation.
- Asked by the King for guidance, they convince him that he has the right to claim the French throne and invade France for that purpose.
- The French Ambassador brings an insulting present and message to the King from the Dauphin of France. This prompts Henry to prepare for invasion.

Commentary on Act 1, scene 1

Many of the audience at a performance of *Henry V* will have seen Shakespeare's earlier plays, *Henry IV, Parts 1 and 2*. They will have met Prince Hal, the future Henry V, preferring the riotous company in the Boar's Head tavern, Sir John Falstaff and his followers, to that of his father's court.

They will have seen another side of Hal in *Part 2* when he fought single-handed, killing a leading conspirator in the rebellion against his father's rule. In the closing stages of that play they will have witnessed the newly crowned King discard his old friend Falstaff with the harsh words: 'I know thee not old man. Fall to thy prayers.' What, they must have wondered, did this change mean?

They will now see the new man: Henry the

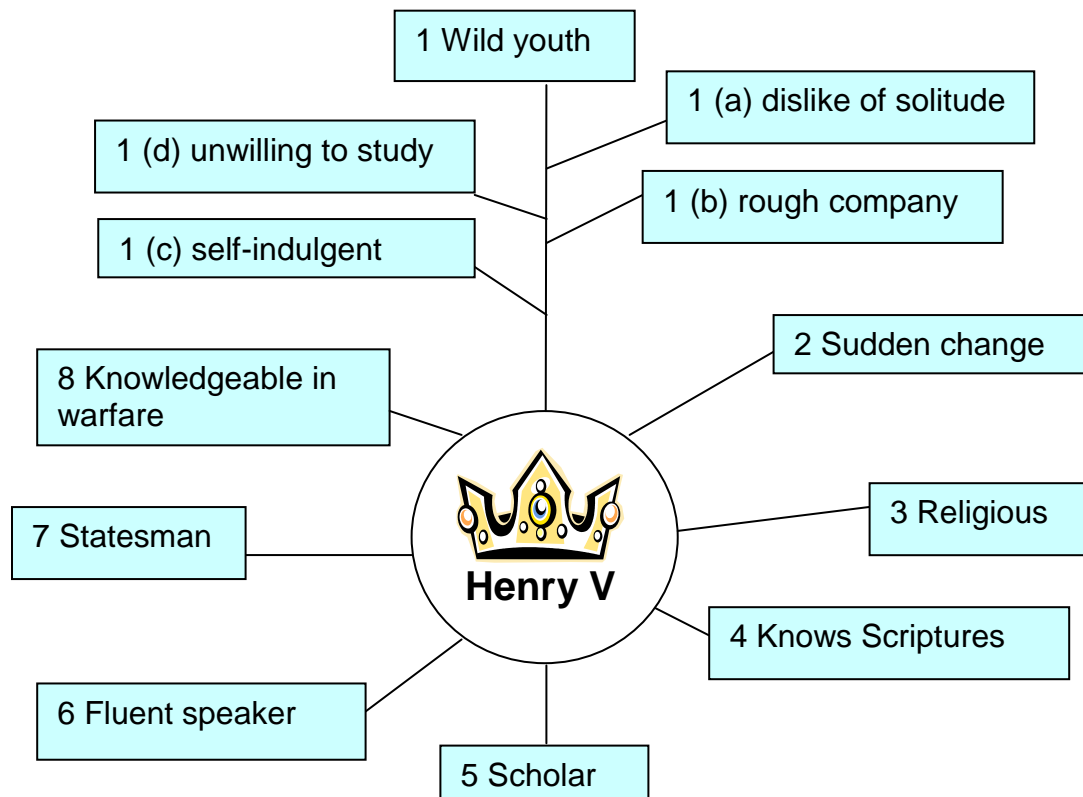
King. To help them, Shakespeare has used the dramatist's technique of presenting a character, through:

- what he says
- what he does
- what other people say about him.

In Act 1 we learn much from what others say. Chorus comments on 'the warlike Harry'. The two bishops in scene 1 discuss the remarkable change in the King, who is now 'full of grace and fair regard', in contrast to the time of 'his wildness' when his hours were 'filled up with riots, banquets, sports'. The King seems almost too good to be true, but we must take the bishops at their word because it is accepted practice that such commentators speak only the truth.

Activity 1.1

- 1 Study the spidergram on page 13. Each strand shows an aspect of Henry's character, described by the two bishops in lines 20–69 ('The King is full of grace ... How things are perfected'). The top strand (1) refers to the time before his father's death, the rest (2–8) to his sudden change on becoming King.
- 2 Find at least one short quotation to illustrate each of the numbered strands.
- 3 Keep your list as a basis for further study of Henry's character as you read on.



Commentary on Act 1, scene 2

In scene 2 we learn the Dauphin's opinion of the new king: 'you savour too much of your youth.' He warns Henry against taking a light-hearted approach in French affairs:

There's naught in France
That can be with a nimble galliard won;
You cannot revel into dukedoms there.

Here we must be careful. Is the Dauphin judging Henry by his earlier reputation? Is he merely trying to thrust home his insults? As we shall see later, the Dauphin's view of the King is totally misguided.

Here we see the King in action for the first time. What he says and does seems to confirm the bishops' good opinion of him.

- He seeks, and takes, advice on whether he may claim the throne of France 'with right and conscience'.

- Persuaded that he is not bound by Salic Law and may justly proceed, he is 'well resolved' but acknowledges that he can do nothing without God's help.
- He shows he is aware of the horror of war.
- He is cautious about leaving England undefended 'against the Scot'.
- He shows determination and a belief that he can succeed in his enterprise.
- Warned by the Ambassador that he may not like what he is about to hear, he declares he is 'no tyrant, but a Christian king' and permits him to speak freely.
- Insulted by the Dauphin's mocking message and gift, he is roused to a steely but restrained fury, declaring: 'We have now no thought in us but France'.

Activity 1.2

- 1 Read the speech which starts 'We are glad the Dauphin is so pleasant with us' (line 259). Either take it in turns to read out different sections, or read the whole speech, trying to create the effect you think Henry intended. Notice Henry's use of irony (disguising one's meaning, often in grim humour). Is he really glad that the Dauphin is 'so pleasant'? Does his reference to the 'pleasant prince' later reflect his true feelings? How this would affect his tone of voice?
- 2 Find and examine the two extended **metaphors** (images which speak of something as if it is something else). The first, describing his intended attack on France, uses puns (double meanings) based on a number of terms in tennis. In the second, he uses the sun as a metaphor for his rise to glory on the French throne (he thinks he will rise, and shine, like the sun).
- 3 Notice the use of **alliteration** (the repetition of sounds, usually at the start of words) to highlight phrases: 'pleasant prince', 'mock mock' and 'mock mothers'.
- 4 Mark out the sections of the speech where the King shifts his theme or emphasis. You will probably find five. Think about how each would be spoken.
- 5 Rehearse and act the whole speech, trying to create the effect you think Henry intended. Think about: (a) how his tone of voice would change to reflect his feelings; (b) his actions; (c) his body-language.

Activity 1.3

Henry now needed troops to fight the battles ahead. There was no regular army though many nobles had groups of men paid to fight for them. Henry was less concerned with numbers than having a well-trained, well-disciplined army.

Design a recruitment poster to attract volunteers. Here are some hints:

- 1 Longbowmen were paid from 6 to 12 pence (a shilling) a day, men-at-arms and mounted archers a shilling, squires and nobles 2 to 13 shillings.
- 2 Many poor men would welcome the chance to earn some money.
- 3 Three-quarters of the army were longbowmen; there were also foot-soldiers and mounted men.
- 4 People such as arrow-makers (fleshers) and armourers were also needed.
- 5 Many would enjoy the comradeship, getting away from home, and adventure.
- 6 Few would think about being wounded, or even dying, in battle.
- 7 Look at other military recruitment posters.

Activity 1.4

Imagine that you are the French Ambassador after his return to the French court. Give King Charles a detailed account of your visit, from the time of your reception by King Henry to your departure. Try to describe Henry's different emotions as he spoke, and your overall impression of his response to the Dauphin's message.