



**JONATHAN BAILEY**

**RICHARD II**

**By William Shakespeare**

**EDUCATION PACK**

**BRIDGE  
THEATRE**

# INSIDE THIS PACK

## Welcome to the Bridge Theatre

Explore the Bridge Theatre, including how its versatile space is transformed for various productions.

## A Play of its Time

Learn about the historical context which would have influenced Shakespeare when he wrote *Richard II*.

## The Troubled Reign of Richard II

Dr Charles Farris provides an insightful overview of the real life Richard II and the challenges he faced.

## Timeline of Events

Trace the sequence of events in *Richard II* and see how they align with historical occurrences.

## Richard II's Family Tree

Understand the relationships between the play's characters through the family tree.

## The Poetry of Kings & Rebels

Learn about the use of blank verse in the play, with an activity to deepen understanding.

## The Divine Right of Kings

Discover the concept of the Divine Right of Kings and the impact it made on Richard II's rule.

## Live Production Analysis

Capture your observations with our structured guides to analyse the production during the interval and after the show.

## Theatre Trip Risk Assessment

Plan your visit to *Richard II* with the help of our example risk assessment template.

## Activity Included

This symbol indicates that the section contains an interactive activity

# THE BRIDGE

Welcome to the Bridge Theatre. Our space was founded in 2017 by Nicholas Hytner and Nick Starr with the goal of commissioning and producing new shows as well as staging popular classics. The 900-seat auditorium is designed to be flexible and can be adapted for a variety of performance styles, resulting in hugely successful immersive theatre as well as more traditional end-on and thrust-stage shows. It was the first wholly new theatre of scale to be added to London's commercial theatre sector in 80 years.

The flexible space leads to interesting and creative staging for all productions, and uniquely provides creative teams with a relative 'blank slate' of staging configurations, which allows them to control the ways in which the audience experience and interact with each show.

This production of *Richard II* is performed 'in-the-round' – the first time this configuration has been used at The Bridge.

Some of the configurations used in the past are photographed below:



**Immersive free roam**  
*A Midsummer Night's Dream* (2019)



**End-on**  
*Young Marx* (2017)



**Thrust**  
*Straight Line Crazy* (2022)

Photos: Manuel Harlan and Philip Vile

# A PLAY OF ITS TIME

*Richard II* (or *The Tragedy of King Richard the Second*, as it was then known) was first performed in 1595 by Shakespeare's own company of actors, the Lord Chamberlain's Men, during a time of great uncertainty in England.

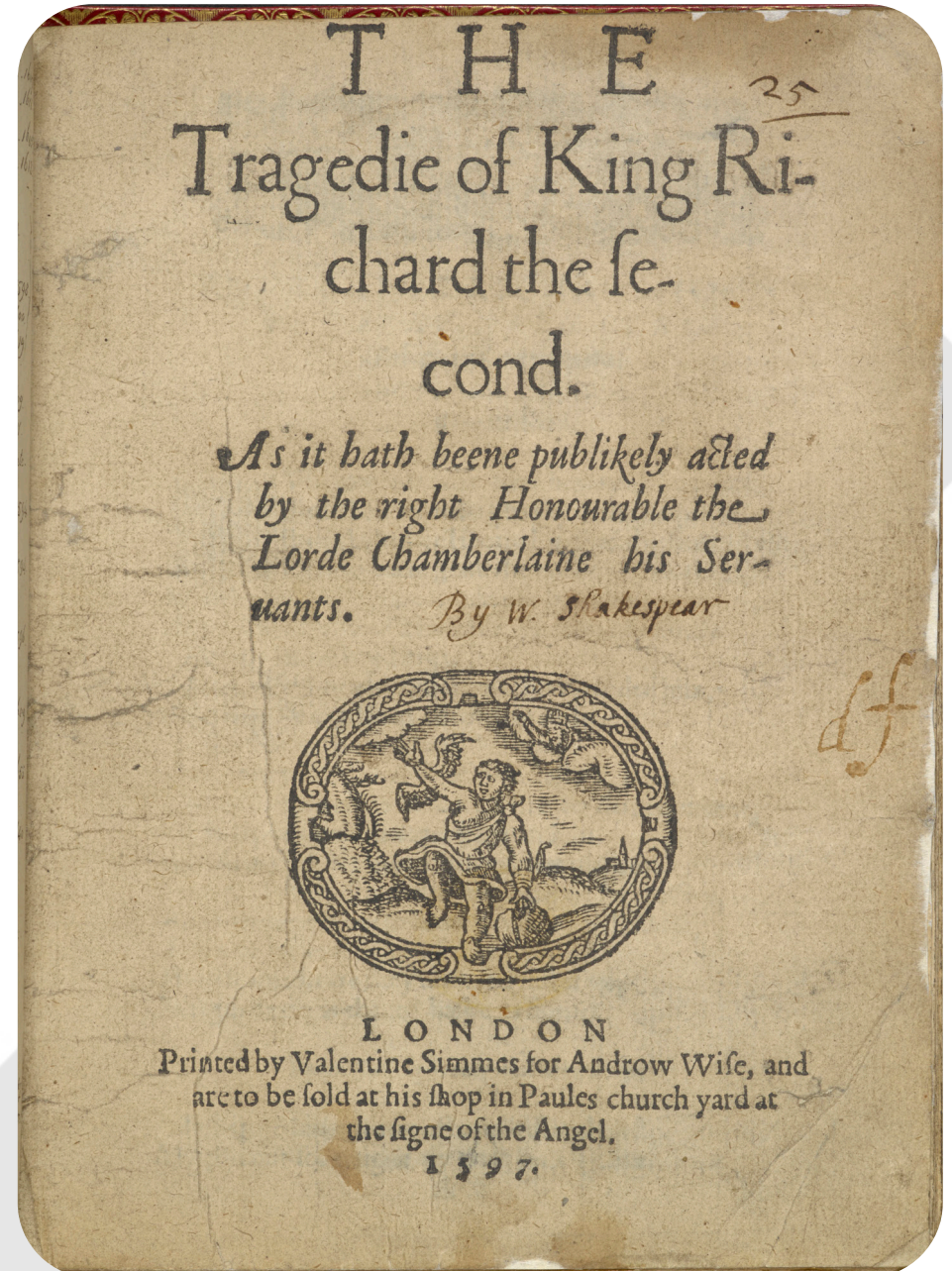
Queen Elizabeth I, by then in her sixties, had no heir and no clear successor, leaving the nation on edge. People worried about what would happen when the throne was left vacant, and Shakespeare's tale of a monarch whose reign collapses would have resonated strongly.

Based on the life of a real historical figure, Shakespeare's *Richard II* charts the final years of England's doomed King, from 1398 up until his mysterious death in 1400.

Richard's reign is remembered as a tumultuous period, but his youthful inexperience and autocratic character have been transformed into the tale of a tragic, poetic figure in the play based on his life. Shakespeare saw the events taking place around him and reflected them back in a story of a monarch undone by political strife, personal flaws, and the relentless pursuit of power.

The late 16th century was marked by upheaval. Failed harvests drove up food prices, and Londoners took to the streets in 1596 to protest. Meanwhile, the court was riddled with factional rivalries, as ambitious noblemen sought to gain greater influence within the looming succession crisis. It was in this climate of anxiety and intrigue that Shakespeare's exploration of power and kingship hit the stage.

When *Richard II* was first printed in 1597, one crucial scene was omitted: Richard's deposition in Act 4, Scene 1. In a time when discussing the removal of a monarch bordered on treason, such a scene was too volatile to commit to print. But the play's subversive undertones lingered, and



Title page of the first edition of *The Tragedie of King Richard the Second*. Courtesy British Library, Huth 46

by 1601, the Earl of Essex's rebellion gave *Richard II* a dangerous new resonance.

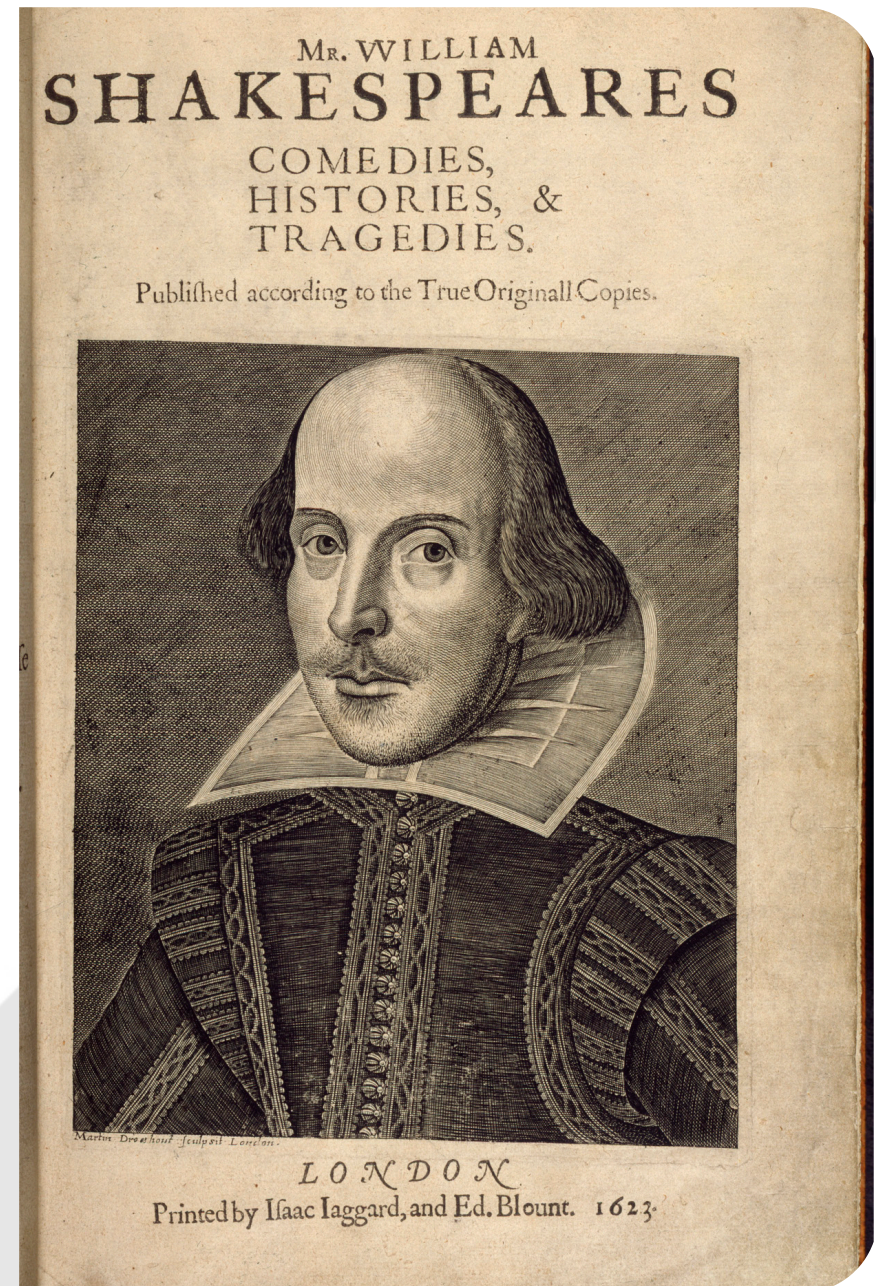
A charismatic courtier and soldier, Essex was a former favourite of the Queen. But after a series of military failures, including a disastrous mission in Ireland, he had quickly fallen from Elizabeth's graces. After being sidelined in court, he was determined to regain power and influence, even if that meant seizing it by force.

On the night before his failed uprising, Essex's followers arranged a private performance of Shakespeare's *Richard II*, deposition scene and all. They had to pay over the odds to convince the Lord Chamberlain's Men to go ahead with this provocative performance.

Even Queen Elizabeth reportedly drew parallels between herself and the doomed king. While visiting Essex in the Tower of London after the rebellion, she is said to have remarked, "I am Richard II, know you not that?"

But in reality, Elizabeth was no Richard. Where he faltered, she thrived, outmaneuvering her rivals and squashing the rebellion with utmost authority. Essex meanwhile never left the Tower. He was quickly beheaded on 25 February 1601, and buried at the Tower's parish church, the Chapel Royal of St Peter ad Vincula.

Writing two hundred years after the events in the play took place, the politics surrounding Richard II would have been very familiar to Shakespeare's first audiences. Even today, tales of ineffectual rulers resonate, demonstrating that history will always repeat itself.



Portrait of William Shakespeare in the First Folio, 1625. Courtesy British Library, G.11631

# THE TROUBLED REIGN OF RICHARD II

Shakespeare's tragic play was based on the real life historical figure of Richard II. We asked Dr Charles Farris to tell us more about the factual events that led up to the ones immortalised by Shakespeare.

## Difficult Beginnings

Richard II had a lot to live up to when he came to the throne in 1377 at the age of just 10 years old. His grandfather, Edward III, had been a great warrior king, but who had left a country embroiled in the 100 Years War with France, and suffering from the consequences of the Black Death, in which perhaps half the population of the country had died. To make matters worse, his father, Edward the Black Prince, had been another mighty warrior who had won many famous battles. Edward died in 1376 of dysentery and was buried with much mourning in Canterbury Cathedral. Meeting the

high expectations of his people was not going to be easy.

## The Peasants' Revolt

In 1381, 14-year-old Richard looked out from the Tower of London to see a city in flames and people in uprising. The Peasants Revolt demanded better wages for workers and the punishment of royal officials who had been vicious in their collection of taxes. Young Richard begged the rebels to return home from the walls of the Tower, but they refused. The next day he marched out to meet the rebels and promised to meet their demands.



Richard II holding court after his coronation. Courtesy British Library, Royal 14 E. IV

While he did so the rebels stormed the Tower and killed some of his most senior officials. The revolt would eventually be put down. Richard had shown extraordinary courage for one so young and the future looked promising.

### Richard Humiliated

By 1387, Richard was 20 years old and starting to assert his authority. He surrounded himself with a group of favourites who were becoming increasingly unpopular with most of his nobility. A powerful group of nobles including Thomas, Duke of Gloucester (Richard's Uncle)

excluded five of Richard's favourites from the King's council and accused them of treason. Richard once again retreated for the Tower of London, but the 'Lords Appellant' as they became known had outmanoeuvred him and executed many of Richard's favourites. Richard would not forgive or forget this embarrassment.

### Richard's Revenge

As Richard grew older, he began to assert himself more. He had not learnt his lesson and still surrounded himself with favourites, neglecting to gain the support of his mightiest



subjects. To make matters worse Richard spent huge sums of money but failed to secure the military victories which would have silenced his critics. By 1397 Richard felt confident enough to seek revenge on his opponents. He began arresting some of his mightiest subjects, including the Duke of Gloucester and Earls of Arundel and Warwick.

Many of Richard's enemies were executed, died under mysterious

circumstances, or were exiled. Thus began the part of his reign which has gone down in history as the 'Tyranny of Richard II'. Shakespeare's play begins during this period and shows a king full of confidence and anxious to assert his authority and revenge. Despite his confidence, Richard was not as politically secure as he thought, and a powerful group of nobles, led by his cousin Henry Bolingbroke, took power and the king was deposed. In





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1399, Richard found himself back in the Tower of London, this time as a prisoner. He was just 32 years old.

### **A King Deposed**

Richard's cousin Bolingbroke, now Henry IV, prepared for his own coronation. According to report Richard 'hoped that his cousin would be a good lord to him', this was wishful thinking. As long as Richard was alive, he was a potential threat to the new king. Richard was first moved to Knaresborough and then Pontefract Castle. An uprising in 1400 probably sealed his fate. Most chroniclers think he died on 14 February. Some say he was violently murdered, others that he was starved to death, others that he starved himself to death. On 17 February orders were given to bring his body to London.

### **The Afterlife of Richard II**

Richard's last will and testament asked that he be buried in the tomb he had commissioned in 1395 in Westminster Abbey next to the tomb of his wife Queen Anne. However, Henry IV would not meet these demands and had him buried in the priory of the Dominican

friars at King's Langley. In 1413, Henry's son, Henry V had him ceremonially reburied as requested at Westminster. Richard has gone down in history as a king who faced many challenges and spectacularly failed to meet most of them. He was though an important patron of literature and the arts, and the hammer-beam roof of the Great Hall at Westminster Palace and the sublime Wilton Diptych, both of which he commissioned, will forever lay beautiful testament to his troubled reign.



**DR CHARLES FARRIS**  
PUBLIC HISTORIAN,  
HM TOWER OF LONDON  
HISTORIC ROYAL PALACES



*King Richard II is taken into the Tower of London as a prisoner. Courtesy British Library, Harley 4380*



# TIMELINE OF EVENTS

The events in Shakespeare's *Richard II* begin in 1398. To help you track the shift from fact to fiction, we've highlighted these moments in red and paired them with the corresponding scenes from the play, allowing you to explore the true events of Richard's reign alongside Shakespeare's dramatic interpretation.

## 6 January 1367

Richard II was born in Bordeaux, France

## April 1367

Henry Bolingbroke was born in Lincolnshire, England

## September 1370

Edward, Richard's elder brother, died

## 8 June 1376

Edward, the Black Prince, died

## 30 January 1377

Edward III died

## 16 July 1377

Coronation of Richard II

## 5 February 1381

Bolingbroke married Mary de Bohun

## 14 June 1381

The Peasants' Revolt, led by figures like Wat Tyler and John Ball, stormed London, demanding the abolition of serfdom and lower taxes

## 20 January 1382

Richard II married Anne of Bohemia

## 19 November 1386

The Lords Appellant, a group of powerful nobles, took control of the government, limiting Richard's power. The group included Bolingbroke and Thomas Mowbray

## 16 September 1386

Bolingbroke's first son was born, the future Henry V

## 3 February – 4 June 1388

The Merciless Parliament. Members of Richard's court were convicted of treason by the Lords Appellant

## February 1389

Richard assumed full control of the throne. He never forgave the Lords Appellant

## 1394

Anne of Bohemia, Queen of England, died  
Mary de Bohun, Bolingbroke's wife, died

## 4 November 1396

Richard married 6 year-old Isabella de Valois

## 13 September 1398 (Act 1, Scene 3)

Bolingbroke was exiled from England

## 3 February 1399 (Act 2, Scene 1 & Scene 4)

John of Gaunt died. Richard seized his estate for the crown

## May 1399 (Act 2, Scene 2)

Richard went to Ireland, taking many of his supporters with him

## Summer 1399 (Act 2, Scene 3)

Bolingbroke returned from exile to claim his father's estate, and in the King's absence, led a rebellion

## 19 August 1399 (Act 3, Scene 3)

Richard surrendered to Bolingbroke at Flint Castle

## 1 September 1399

Richard was imprisoned in the Tower of London

## 29 September 1399 (Act 4, Scene 1)

Richard was forced to sign an abdication order

## 1 October 1399

Richard was formally deposed by Parliament

## 13 October 1399

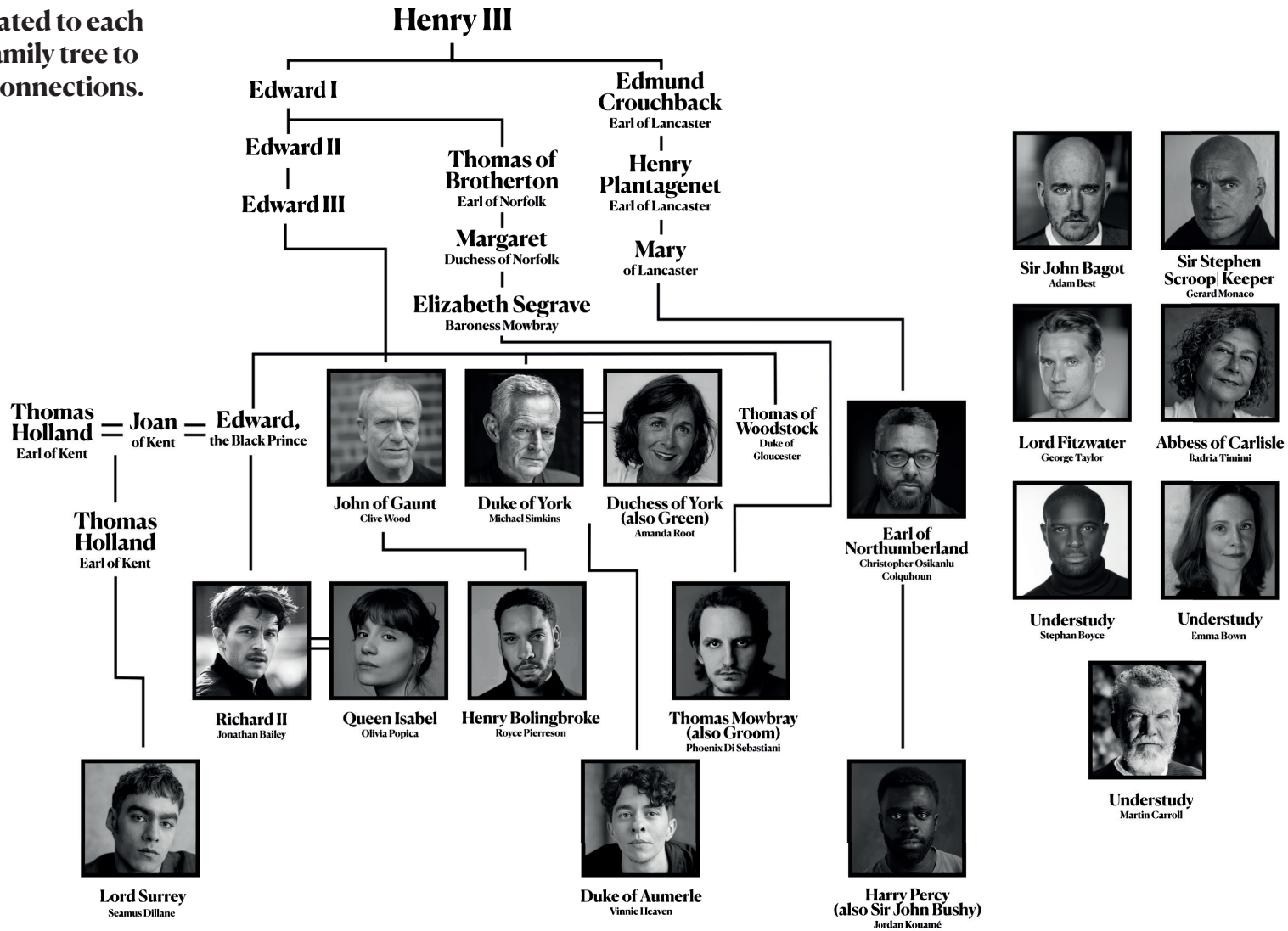
Bolingbroke was crowned King of England, becoming Henry IV

## 14 February 1400 (Act 5, Scene 5)

Richard died in captivity at Pontefract Castle

# RICHARD II'S FAMILY TREE

Many of the characters in *Richard II* are related to each other. Use the family tree to discover these connections.



## RICHARD II

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# THE POETRY OF KINGS & REBELS

Shakespeare wrote *Richard II* almost entirely in blank verse, giving the play a musical rhythm that captures both the refinement and turmoil of Richard's character.

Blank verse is Shakespeare's go-to for serious drama. It is a type of poetry that doesn't rhyme but has a steady rhythm called iambic pentameter. Imagine a heartbeat: da-DUM, da-DUM, da-DUM, da-DUM, da-DUM. It can feel natural or grand as needed, so it's perfect for kings and rebels alike to plot, rage or lament as required.

This rich, lyrical style mirrors Richard's dramatic flair and obsession with his divine right, while the structure helps distinguish him from the hardened practicality of Bolingbroke.

## What is iambic pentameter?

Each line is composed of ten syllables in a pattern of alternating unstressed and stressed syllables.

da-DUM da-DUM da-DUM da-DUM da-DUM

Each 'da-DUM' is an 'iamb' and pentameter means that there are five measures of them.

"For God's sake, let us sit upon the ground  
And tell sad stories of the death of kings."

"for GOD's sake, LET us SIT upON the GROUND  
and TELL sad STORIES OF the DEATH of KINGS."

## ACTIVITY: WRITE ABOUT A CURRENT EVENT IN BLANK VERSE



### DID YOU KNOW?

**Iambic Pentameter was first introduced to English verse by Chaucer in the 1380s (not long before the events of this play). He would have encountered the style of writing during his travels in Italy and France where the style was popular.**

# THE DIVINE RIGHT OF KINGS

“ Not all the water in the rough, rude sea  
Can wash the balm from an anointed king;  
The breath of worldly men cannot depose  
The deputy elected by the Lord.

RICHARD II (ACT 3, SCENE 2) ”

**Richard II believed his rule was ordained by God, granting him an absolute authority that no mortal should challenge. This concept, the Divine Right of Kings, was widespread among medieval monarchs. But Richard's upbringing infused him with an even grander sense of destiny.**

From childhood, Richard was surrounded by symbols of divinity. He'd been brought up on tales of the three kings who had attended his christening, echoing the magi's visit to Christ. He was also heir to a saintly lineage, that of Edward the Confessor. The tomb of England's last Anglo-Saxon king had become a site of miracles. Sitting on Edward's throne and wearing his crown, young Richard was steeped in the notion of sacred kingship.

Soon after his 10th birthday, following his father's death and his grandfather's declining health, Richard was formally presented to Parliament. As he was ushered in, a declaration rang out: "Here is my beloved Son, He who is wished for by all men." To those present that day, the biblical reference was clear. For a boy being hastily prepared for the throne, the message was even clearer: he was England's saviour.

Richard's coronation soon cemented this idea. As sacred oils anointed his body, he must have felt transformed, no longer a mere boy but God's chosen ruler. This conviction would shape his reign.

Only four years into his rule, Richard faced a grave crisis. A fiery rebellion swept through London. Enraged mobs torched homes, including John of Gaunt's palace, and dragged officials from their beds. Taking refuge within the strong walls of the Tower of London, Richard's advisors made a bold plan. The young king must confront the rebels directly. Mounted on horseback, Richard rode out, calming their fury with grand words and promises. For a young ruler, it was a triumph, a moment that affirmed his belief in his own exceptional destiny.

Yet Richard's vision of kingship, forged from myth and hyperbole, lacked much in the way of practical grounding. He'd not had time to learn the art of leadership from his grandfather, nor had the chance to see his father ascend the throne and take command. He'd been left with the childish belief that his desires and England's welfare were one and the same, that his rule embodied the very soul of the nation. To Richard, he was not just a king, he was England itself.

## DID YOU KNOW?

**Richard II broke with tradition by introducing the title "Your Majesty" to the English court, borrowing from the grandeur of European monarchies. Before his reign, English kings were addressed as "Your Highness."**

# LIVE PRODUCTION ANALYSIS

When writing about a Live Production you've seen for your GCSE or A Level, it's important to take detailed notes at interval and immediately after the performance in order to recall specific examples for your essays.

Use the templates below to add your own notes when you see the show, and take a look at the terminology banks to structure your ideas.

## PRODUCTION INFORMATION

Name of play:	
Playwright:	
Director:	
Designers:	
Venue:	
Date you attended:	
Actors' names & roles:	
Key themes:	
How did the show make you feel:	

# LIVE PRODUCTION ANALYSIS

## TERMINOLOGY BANK

Pitch, Pace, Tone, Volume, Accent, Emphasise, Projection, Diction, Articulation, Breath control, Accent, Posture, Eye contact, Mime, Carriage, Facial expression, Levels, Gesture, Body language, Proxemics, Stillness



## ACTING

Use the terminology bank to record your observations in the grid below immediately after watching the show

Vocal skills	Physical skills	Characterisation

# LIVE PRODUCTION ANALYSIS

## TERMINOLOGY BANK

Colour, Texture, Shape, Scale, Intensity,  
Distribution, Distortion, Direction



## LIGHTING

Use the terminology bank to record your observations in the grid below immediately after watching the show


# LIVE PRODUCTION ANALYSIS

## TERMINOLOGY BANK

Texture, Shape, Scale, Variation, Intensity,  
Distribution, Distortion, Direction



## SOUND

Use the terminology bank to record your observations in the grid below immediately after watching the show




# LIVE PRODUCTION ANALYSIS

When writing about Live Production Analysis in your assessments, your Teachers and the Examiners are looking to see that you understood both **what** you saw on stage, and also the **impact** it had. In order to ensure you communicate both these priorities, you need to make sure that your descriptions, explanations, analysis and evaluations have a balance of both AO3 and AO4 terminology.

This means:

**AO3:** Knowledge and understanding of how theatre and performance is made and developed

**AO4:** Analysis and evaluation of the ideas of others (in this case, Live Production)

To ensure each of your Live Production references adequately balances these two outcomes, the model below can be used to structure your notes:

1. Describe what you saw/heard on stage
2. Explain how that moment was created using in-depth AO3 terminology
3. Analyse how this moment impacted the audience
4. Evaluate how this impact was achieved and what the outcome was

## A04 TERMINOLOGY BANK

Humour, Empathy, Fear, Affection, Pride, Tension, Shock, Disapproval, Nostalgia, Familiarity  
Effective, Impressive, Engaging, Precise, Amusing  
Contextually appropriate, Narrative links  
Effectiveness of intent  
Playwright's intentions  
Director's intentions  
To indicate the original context  
To make relevant to a contemporary audience  
To recontextualise  
To highlight a specific theme  
To reinterpret historic facts  
To reframe an assumption

