

THE LIFE AND DEATH OF KING
Richard the Second



1

SHAKESPEARE

1 of 8 in the
chronological order
of Shakespeare's
sequential history plays

Edited and designed by Robin Williams

Richard the Second: Tidbits

Printing

Richard 2 was **printed** in **quarto** (small, paperback versions) in **1597** and twice in **1598**, and again in **1608**, this time with a shortened version of a deposition scene. The **1623** hard-bound large volume of the collected works, the **First Folio**, includes the deposition scene as we know it today.

Prose—not

Richard 2 and *King John* are the only two plays in the canon in which there is **no prose** whatsoever. The good thing about this is that the lines in various editions tend to be the same!

Rhymed Verse

About twenty percent of the play is in rhymed verse. Why is this?

Length of play

The play is **in length** between the longest and the shortest, about 2,803 lines.

Act 1: 659 lines

Act 2: 649 lines

Act 3: 590 lines

Act 4: 565 lines

Earl of Essex and *Richard the Second*

You might have read that when the **Earl of Essex** was planning to overthrow Queen Elizabeth in 1601, he asked the Chamberlain's Men (the acting troupe that included William Shakespeare) to perform "Shakespeare's *Richard the Second*." This isn't actually true. In the records of the court depositions at the trial of Essex (whose head was shortly thereafter smit off as a traitor), every witness tells the same story—that Essex's men asked for the play of **Henry the Fourth**, and several people, while being deposed, mentioned that it is the play in which there is a deposition of Richard 2. Shakespeare's play, of which three copies were in print at the time, two with his name on the title pages, *did not include the deposition scene*—it was not until years after the

Queen died that this play includes the deposition scene of Richard 2. Also in Shakespeare's play, there is only *one* mention of Henry 4, as "Henry, fourth of that name," indicating that Shakespeare's play would not even be known as a play about Henry the Fourth. At the trial, an actor from the Chamberlain's Men is called to the stand, but never is William Shakespeare called, even though his name is on the title pages, indicating Shakespeare's play is *not* the one in question. There were several other plays about Henry the Fourth at the time.

Sadly, because there is so little of Shakespeare in the public record, every tiny possibility, no matter how faint, is aggrandized into "fact."

The Divine Right of Kings

The Divine Right of Kings is a political doctrine in defense of monarchical absolutism, which asserts that Kings derive their authority from God and can not therefore be held accountable for their actions by any earthly authority, such as a parliament. Originating in Europe, the divine-right theory can be traced to the medieval conception of God's award of temporal power to the political ruler, paralleling the award of spiritual power to the church. By the 16th and 17th centuries, however, the new national monarchs were asserting their authority in matters of both church and state. King James I of England

(reigned 1603–25) was the foremost exponent of the Divine Right of Kings; the doctrine virtually disappeared from English politics after the Glorious Revolution (1688–1689). —*Encyclopedia Britannica*

Shakespeare's play of *Richard the Second* was written before King James came to the throne but still has many inferences to this doctrine.

Richard seems to use a medieval view of the Divine Right of Kings, while Bolingbroke has a more modern view, in that being *born* a king is not all that's necessary to good kingship—one also needs intellect and a political shrewdness

Richard the Second: in the history cycle

Shakespeare's British history plays in historical order:

King John Reigned 1199–1216. Play opens in 1199, just after John inherits the throne from his brother Richard the Lionheart's death; closes in 1216 with John's death.

*There is a gap of almost 200 years before Shakespeare's next play.
The following eight plays are sequential.*

Richard 2 Reigned 1379–1399. Play opens in 1398, shortly after the murder of Richard's uncle Woodstock; closes in February, 1400, the death of Richard.

1 Henry 4 Reigned 1399–1413. Play opens in June 1402, with the seeds of rebellion; closes in July 1403 with the battle of Shrewsbury.

2 Henry 4 Reigned 1399–1413. Play opens in July 1403, continuing the battle of Shrewsbury; closes in April 1413, with the coronation of Henry 5.

Henry 5 Reigned 1413–1422. Play opens in 1414 with plans to invade France; closes in 1420 following the Battle of Agincourt.

1 Henry 6 Reigned 1422–1461; again in 1470–1471. Play opens in 1422 at the death of Henry 5, when Henry 6 is nine months old; closes in 1445 at wedding of Henry 6.

2 Henry 6 Reigned 1422–1461; again in 1470–1471. Play opens in 1445 at the Queen's coronation; closes in 1455 after the first Battle of St. Albans.

3 Henry 6 Reigned 1422–1461; again in 1470–1471. Play opens in 1460, in the battles of second St. Albans and Wakefield; closes in 1471 at the death of Henry 6 and the Yorkist victory at Tewkesbury. Edward 4 takes the throne.

Richard 3 Reigned 1483–1485. Play opens in 1471 with Richard, Duke of Gloucester, already planning to murder his brother Clarence; closes in 1485 at the Battle of Bosworth.

Edmund Tudor, Earl of Richmond—a descendant of the bastard line of John of Gaunt through his mother Margaret Beaufort, and also the bastard line of his grandfather Owen Tudor, who secretly married (or didn't) the widow of Henry 5—won the battle of Bosworth where Richard 3 was killed; Richmond became Henry 7, the first Tudor king, and reigned until 1509. Henry 7's oldest son Arthur died of the sweat at Ludlow Castle in 1502 at the age of 15, newly married to Catherine of Aragon (age 17), to whom he had been engaged since the age of 11. Six months after their unconsummated wedding, Arthur died and his brother Henry became heir to the throne; when he became King Henry the Eighth in 1509, Henry (18 years old) married his brother's wife, Catherine (24 years old). They were married for 24 years.

Henry 8 Reigned 1509–1547; play opens in 1520, just after The Field of the Cloth of Gold; closes in 1533, the year Anne Boleyn was crowned his Queen.

Richard the Second: Themes and Motifs

Themes are over-arching ideas that are explored and developed; **motifs** are repetitive elements that support and embellish the themes. These are a few of the themes and motifs in this play. Take note of them and think about why each one is used. (And the usual motifs are in this play: appearance versus reality, the Wheel of Fortune, death and the grave, honor, the rights and duties of kingship, etc.)

Family dynamics	Brothers, cousins, children, fathers, uncles, aunts, and their various dynamics.
Blood	Blood as in blood in our veins, blood kin, blood line, and more.
Sun	The sun was Richard's badge or symbol. As the most important object in our sky, it can represent Richard, the splendor of kingship, God's grace, the divinity of a king, and more.
England	As a British history play, this begins the eight-play sequence that showcases the path that put Elizabeth (the Queen while Shakespeare was writing these) on the throne.
Ascent/descent	As you read, picture in your mind the rising, bending, climbing higher, descending, including non-verbal mounting, dismounting. This is tied in with balance and symmetry , both visually and in their speech.
Earth/garden/elements	How do the garden and earthy motifs add to the play?
Language/words	This is called Shakespeare's most lyrical play. The imagery is "evocative, sensual, luxuriant, and exotic." There is very little action—mostly the characters talk about what they plan to do and what they did, making for lots of beautiful—and lengthy—speeches. But even more interesting, the characters seem to be aware of their uses of language. Note how many references there are to language, speaking, breath, words, silence.
Biblical references	From Cain and Abel to Christ crucified, biblical references are throughout. Consider why Shakespeare uses this theme.
Youth and age	Watch for contrasts between the ideals and foibles of the young and the older.
Life as a tale	The characters often see themselves as actors in a story; they are very conscious of their role in the historical record.
Music	The language in this play is often not just poetic, but suggestive of song, lyrical, personal, sometimes self-referential as music. Richard's language changes as he goes through his tribulations—watch for it.

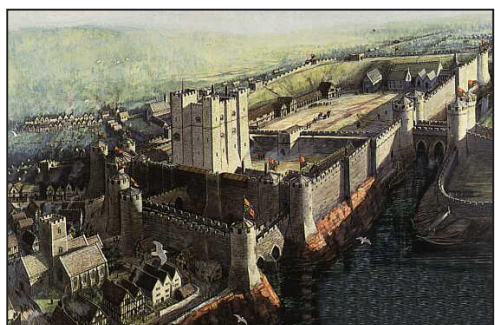
Richard the Second: The Lords Appellant



Pontefract (Pomfret) Castle in West Yorkshire



Flint Castle in Wales.



Bristol Castle in Bristol.



Berkeley Castle, still occupied, in Berkeley, Gloucestershire.

Ten years before the play opens, when **Richard 2** is twenty years old, three (later five) accusers, the Lords Appellant,* threatened to depose him, in large part because of his relationships with sycophantic followers whom the accusers claimed were leading Richard astray, particularly Robert de Vere, the 9th Earl of Oxford, also suspected of being his lover. The Lords Appellant had nine of Richard's favorites executed based on an Appeal of Treason (although two of them escaped before execution).

Bolingbroke and **Mowbray**, who had also joined the Lords Appellant, ambushed de Vere but he managed to escape and fled to France, where he was later killed in a boar hunt. Three years after de Vere's death, Richard brought his body back to England to be buried in the de Vere family vault. Richard opened the coffin, kissed his beloved friend's hand, and put a ring on his finger.

Richard's Uncle **Gloucester** later conspired to have his own brothers (Gaunt and York) murdered, as well as his nephew Richard. This is what caused Richard to imprison him for treason at Calais under Mowbray's custody. Holinshed (1525-1580) wrote that Richard insistently ordered Mowbray, who was resistant, to "make the Duke secretly away"; after three weeks of hesitating at the peril of his own life, Mowbray had servants throw feather beds upon Gloucester and smother him. Froissart (1337-1405) wrote that the servants strangled him with a towel. The truth is still not known.

Before the play opens, Mowbray mentioned to Bolingbroke that there was a plot to kill both them and others; he insisted they must either counter-plot or flee the country. This conversation is what Bolingbroke uses, in the play, to accuse Mowbray of treason, although in the subtext, Bolingbroke is also accusing Richard of having Gloucester murdered.

In a trial by combat, the one who is righteous wins because God knows the truth and chooses the winner. Thus the combat poses a problem for Richard 2:

If Bolingbroke wins, it proves Uncle Gloucester was murdered, implicating Richard, and Bolingbroke would become even more popular.

If Mowbray wins, it proves that the King plotted the deaths of both Mowbray and Bolingbroke.

*The original Lords Appellant (*appellant* means accuser) were Richard's uncle, Thomas of Woodstock, the Duke of **Gloucester** (eventually murdered); Richard FitzAlan, Earl of **Arundel** and of Surrey (beheaded); and Thomas de Beauchamp, Earl of **Warwick** (lost his title and lands and was exiled to the Isle of Man).

Richard the Second: Historical Characters

The play opens in **April, 1398**; closes in **February, 1400**. Written about 1595.
The names in **red** are how they are usually referred to in the play.

Name and title	Birth date	Death date	Age in play	Age at death
<p>King Richard 2 Son of Edward the Black Prince, who was the oldest son of King Edward 3. Married second wife Isabella de Valois, da. of Charles 6 of France. Richard was nine years old when his father died, and ten years old when his grandfather died, thus becoming King R2.</p>	1367	February 14, 1400 murdered	31/33	33
<p>Queen Isabella Second wife of Richard 2, Isabella de Valois, da. of Charles 6 of France. She was born in 1390, so was historically 8 years old at the time of the play; she died in France in 1409 in childbirth.</p>	1390	1409	8/10	19
<p>John of Gaunt (Ghent), Duke of Lancaster Fourth son of King Edward 3. Married first Blanche of Lancaster; second Constance of Castille, da. of Pedro the Cruel; third his mistress who already had four of his kids, Catherine Swynford. Uncle to Richard 2, patron to Chaucer, father of at least fourteen children.</p>	1340	1399	58/59	59
<p>Henry Bolingbroke, Duke of Hereford Oldest surviving son of John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster; cousin to Richard 2. Ma. Mary de Bohun, then Joan of Navarre. Usurped Richard 2 and became Henry 4.</p>	1366	1413	31/33	46
<p>Edmund of Langley, 1st Duke of York Fifth son of King Edward 3. Married first Isabel of Castille, second da. of Pedro the Cruel; married second to Joan Holland. Brother to Gaunt; father of Aumerle; uncle to Richard 2.</p>	1341	1402	57/59	61
<p>Duchess of York Isabel of Castille is the mother of Aumerle, but she died in 1394 and Joan Holland was the wife of York by the time of the play, thus Aumerle's step-mother. Aunt to Richard 2.</p>	1366	1434	32/34	68
<p>Edward of Norwich, Duke of Aumerle Son of the Duke and Duchess of York (see above). He was also, later, Earl of Rutland and 2nd Duke of York (appears in Shakespeare's play <i>Henry 5</i>).</p>	1373	25 Oct 1415 killed at Agincourt.	25/27	42
<p>Eleanor de Bohun, Duchess of Gloucester Wife of Thomas of Woodstock, Duke of Gloucester (dead before the play begins), aunt to Richard 2. (Her sister is married to her nephew Bolingbroke.)</p>	1365	1399	32/34	35
<p>Thomas Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk He was also Earl of Nottingham. 2nd son of John de Mowbray, 4th Baron Mowbray. On his mother's side, King Edward the First is Mowbray's g-g-grandfather.</p>	1366	Sept 1399	32	33 plague in Venice

Richard the Second: Historical Characters (2 of 3 pages)

Name and title	Birth date	Death date	Age in play	Age at death
Sir John Bushy Speaker of the House of Commons, favorite of R2.	c. 1357	29 July 1399 executed without a trial	40/42	42
Sir William (or John) Bagot Served Gaunt, Bolingbroke, Mowbray; favorite of R2. Escaped to Ireland; captured and imprisoned by H4 for only one year; died at home with his family.	c. 1354	1407	44/46	53
Sir Henry Green Favorite of Richard 2. Second son of Sir Henry Greene and Catherine, da. of Sir John Drayton of Drayton.	c. 1347	29 July 1399 executed without a trial	50/52	52
Thomas Holland, 1st Duke of Surrey, 3rd Earl of Kent Eldest son of Thomas Holland 2nd Earl of Kent and Alice FitzAlan. Married Joan Stafford.	1372	1400 beheaded: Epiphany Rising	25/27	27
John Montacute, 3d Earl of Salisbury Son of Sir John Montacute, whose brother is the 2nd Earl of Salisbury. Not a descendant of William Longsword in King John.	1350	1400 executed by mob	48/50	50
Thomas Lord Berkeley, The Magnificent (per 1641 biog) 5th Baron Berkeley. Ma. Margaret, da. of Warine, Lord Lisle. Had a da. Elizabeth who married Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick.	1353	1417	45/47	64
Henry Percy, 1st Earl of Northumberland Elder son of Henry, 3rd Baron Percy of Alnwick. Rival is Ralph Neville. Married to Margaret Neville.	1341	1408	56/58	66
Henry/Harry Percy, called Hotspur Son of the 1st Earl of Northumberland. Married to Elizabeth Mortimer, da. of Edmund Mortimer, 3rd Earl of March.	1364	23 July 1403 killed at Shrewsbury	34/36	39
William Lord Ross 7th Baron Ross of Hamlake, Yorkshire. Married Margaret, da. of Sir John Arundel.		1414		
William Lord Willoughby, 5th Baron Willoughby de Eresby "His ancestor had been a Norman knight, rewarded by the Conqueror with the lordship of Willoughby, County Lincoln." Thomson p. 306.	1370	1409	28/30	39
Walter Lord Fitzwater, 5th Baron Fitzwater He was the first to throw down his gage to Aumerle. Married Joan Devereux.	1368	1407	30/32	39
Thomas Merke, Bishop of Carlisle Benedictine monk of Westminster. Supported R2; was imprisoned by H4 for one year; pardoned but not restored to bishopric.	c. 1370	1409	28/30	39
William de Colchester, Abbot of Westminster Served as Abbot from 1386 to 1420.		1420		

Richard the Second: Historical Characters (3 of 3 pages)

Name and title	Birth date	Death date	Age in play	Age at death
<p>Sir Pierce Exton Nothing is known except the little that Holinshed writes and Shakespeare reenacts.</p>				
<p>Sir Stephen Scroop (Scrope) Third son of Richard, 1st Baron Scrope of Bolton; brother to William le Scrope, Earl of Wiltshire. (French reverses the genealogy.) Was one of the few who remained faithful to Richard 2 until his surrender at Flint. His widow, Millicent Tiptoft (died at 82), married Sir John Fastolfe.</p>	c. 1350	1408 of the plague	48/50	58
Mentioned but do not appear:				
<p>Thomas of Woodstock, Duke of Gloucester Seventh and youngest son of King Edward 3, thus brother to John of Gaunt and Edmund of Langley. Uncle to Richard 2. Murdered before the play begins, supposedly by Mowbray (smothered, not bloodily killed as in the play).</p>	1350	Apr 1397 (murdered before the play opens)	(47)	47
<p>William le Scrope, Earl of Wiltshire, King of Man His daddy bought him the Isle of Man. Eldest son of Richard, 1st Baron Scrope of Bolton; French reverses the genealogy and makes him the younger son of Henry, 1st Baron Scrope of Masham.</p>	1350	29 July 1399 executed without a trial	48/49	49
<p>Owen Glendower 3.i.43 Descended from Llewelyn, last Prince of Wales. Also spelled Owain ap Gruffydd. His daughter Catherine married Edmund Mortimer.</p>	1354	1416	44/46	62
<p>Sir Thomas Blount of Belton 5.vi.8 Probably a son of Sir John of Belton. "Arrested [by Henry 4] and executed under circumstances of extreme barbarity. While enduring intense suffering, which he bore with great heroism, he was cruelly taunted by Sir Thomas Erpingham."</p>				
<p>Sir Bennet Seely (or Sir John Scheveley or Sir Benedict Seeley) "Sir Richard Brown states that he was Sir John Shelley, ancestor of the family of that name who became baronets, and of whom Sir Philip Charles Shelley, taking the name of Sidney, was created Lord de L' Isle and Dudley."</p>				
<p>Sir John Norberry 2.i.284 One of Bolingbroke's companions. His family seat was Stoke d' Abernon in Surrey.</p>				
<p>Reginald, 2nd Lord Cobham Companion of Bolingbroke on his return from exile.</p>				
<p>Francis Quoint or Point Companion of Bolingbroke on his return from exile.</p>				

Also Spencer, Kent, Broccas, Waterton, Erpingham, Duke of Exeter

Richard the Second: Geeky stuff

Rhymed verse

About twenty percent of this play is in rhymed verse (ten syllable lines, rather than the shorter lines of doggerel or the magical seven/eight-syllable rhymes). Shakespeare always uses rhyme intentionally, and it is up to us to discern its purpose. Don't ignore the rhyme—glory in it, and see if you can feel what it might be doing in a particular instance.

In a rhymed couplet at the end of a scene, it indicates a finishing up of the scene and usually looks forward to the future.

A single rhymed couplet in the middle of a scene can indicate that the character *wants* it to be the end. “Time to go now.”

Rhyme can indicate heightened emotion.

It can connect two characters, especially when they share the rhymes.

It can distance the language from ordinary speech, creating formality and ritual.

It can underscore a significant moment.

It can indicate a shift in a relationship.

It can stress a point.

It highlights the last words even more than usual in an iambic pentameter line.

Rhetorical Devices

Of course Shakespeare always uses an enormous number of rhetorical devices, especially **antithesis** (opposite words or ideas that sharpen the contrast of each), **chiasmus** (words or thoughts repeated in reverse order), **polyptoton** (repetition of words from the same root, as *dead* and *death*, *strong* and *strength*), **antanaclasis** (repetition of the same word but it means something different each time, as in “*Time flies like an arrow, but fruit flies like a banana*”), **anastrophe** (inversion of the usual order of words), and others, but this play has some striking examples of a couple of particular figures.

Prosopopoeia (*pro so po PEE uh*), or personification: An animal or inanimate object is given human characteristics; used about fifty times in this play! We must ask why Shakespeare chose to use this particular device so many times.

Un-words: Shakespeare often invents words by adding “un” to the beginnings. In this play, there are more than fifty un-words, most of which Shakespeare made up. Why so many in this play?

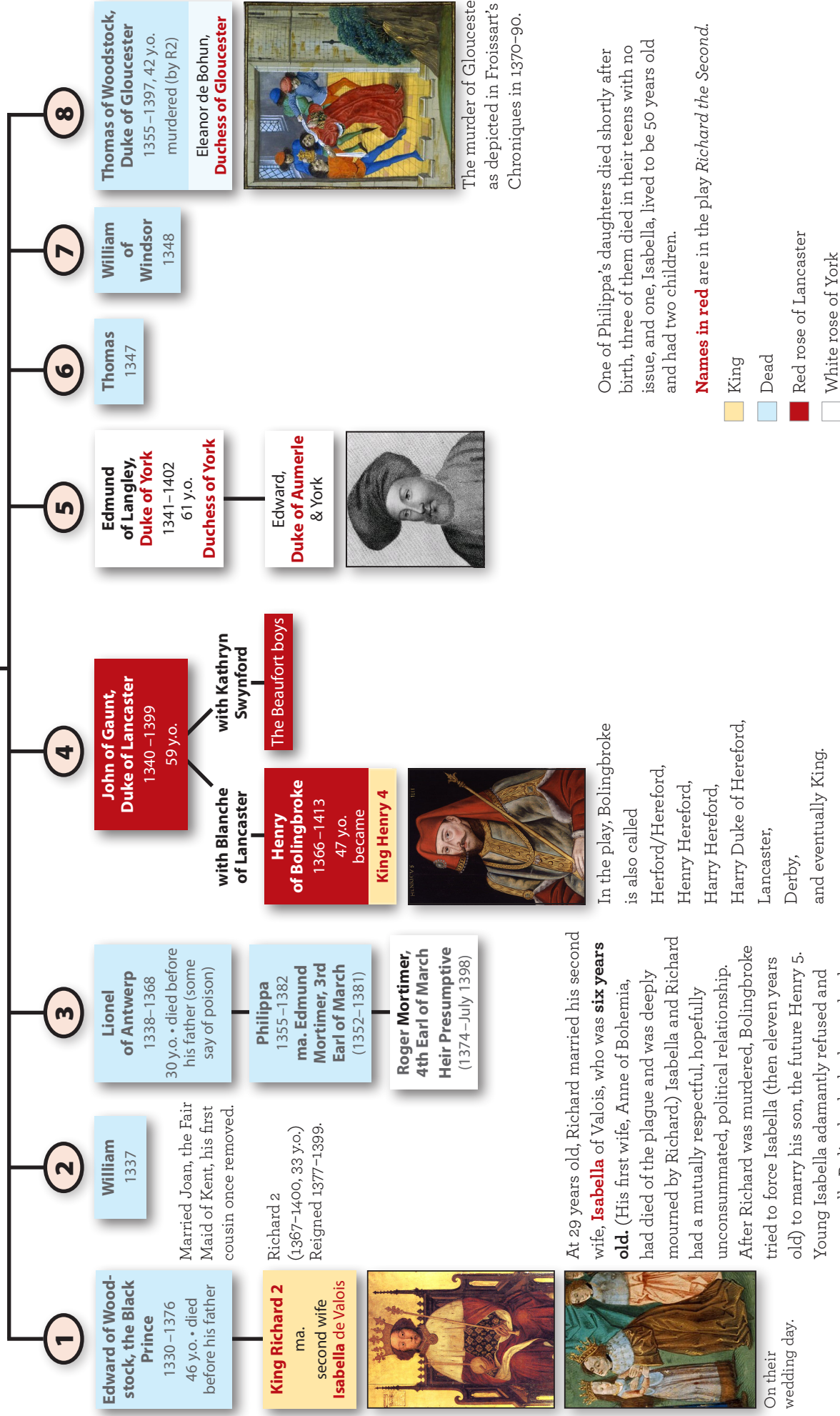
Meter

This play seems* to have a higher number than usual of **broken-back lines**, in which a syllable is missing in the middle of the iambic pentameter line. There are also a surprising number of lines that begin with **choriambic** (˘˘˘) and **ionic** (˘˘˘˘) feet. Why? **I haven't actually scanned every single line in every single play, though!*

Richard the Second: Genealogy

The play opens in April, 1398; closes in February, 1400.

King Edward 3 (1312–1377, 65 y.o.) ma. **Philippa of Hainault** (1314–1369, 55 y.o.)
She bore 14 children: 8 boys and 5 girls



The murder of Gloucester as depicted in Froissart's Chroniques in 1370–90.

One of Philippa's daughters died shortly after birth, three of them died in their teens with no issue, and one, Isabella, lived to be 50 years old and had two children.

Names in red are in the play *Richard the Second*.

- King
- Dead
- Red rose of Lancaster
- White rose of York

The Wars of the Roses, England's civil war, ran from about 1455 through 1487, as told in the *Henry the Sixth* and *Richard the Third* plays.

In the play, Bolingbroke is also called Herford/Hereford, Henry Hereford, Harry Hereford, Harry Duke of Hereford, Lancaster, Derby, and eventually King.

At 29 years old, Richard married his second wife, **Isabella** of Valois, who was **six years old**. (His first wife, Anne of Bohemia, had died of the plague and was deeply mourned by Richard.) Isabella and Richard had a mutually respectful, hopefully unconsummated, political relationship. After Richard was murdered, Bolingbroke tried to force Isabella (then eleven years old) to marry his son, the future Henry 5. Young Isabella adamantly refused and eventually Bolingbroke let her go back to France (although he kept her dowry), where, at 16, she married her 11-year-old cousin the Duke of Orleans. Isabella died in childbirth at 19. Her sister Katherine married Henry 5.