

Northern Broadside
King John Education Pack

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Introduction:

This education pack has been written as a resource for Shakespeare's King John. The contents are intended to be relevant for both those who are familiar with the play, those who know something of Shakespeare and those who have little or no knowledge of the playwright.

Because of this, we recommend that this pack is used selectively. Hopefully there is something for everyone, whether you are teaching, studying or simply have an interest in the play.

During the King John tour (March – June 2001), we are offering a variety of workshops on the play. (For more details on the tour, please visit www.northern-broadsides.co.uk). If you and your group are partaking in these workshops, we highly recommend that you make use of the contents of this pack. This will ensure that our practical workshops are taken up with practical work and we will have the time to really explore the text in greater depth.

The main aim of the sessions contained in this pack is to encourage participants to think about the text from a variety of approaches, practically, visually and dramatically. These skills are transferable and can easily be built upon during further work on Shakespeare or other dramatic texts.

We hope you find this pack of some use. Please fill in the feedback form at the end of the pack and send it to the address below to let us know your opinions – only then will we be able to provide what you require.

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King John Synopsis:

Here is a brief synopsis of King John:

The king's nephew, Arthur, is backed by the King of France in a rebellion. Refusing the King of France's demand that he surrender his throne, John sends an army to France under the command of Philip Faulconbridge (also known as Philip the Bastard). The English army clashes with the French at Angiers, but neither one can claim a decisive victory. John proposes peace with the French king, ceding to him some English fiefs in France and arranging for the Dauphin to wed his niece, Blanche.

However, John is excommunicated by the Pope over a dispute concerning the appointment of the Archbishop of Canterbury. Pandulph, the Pope's legate, orders the French to resume their warfare upon King John. In the conflict that follows, John's army beats back the French and captures Arthur. John wishes him executed; his chamberlain, Hubert, disobeys the order, but Arthur later plunges to his death while trying to escape. John's nobles ironically suspect John of murder—which was his original intent—and desert him for the French. Meanwhile, John arranges a peace of sorts with Pandulph, to whom he turns over the crown of England; he will receive it back, therefore becoming a vassal of the Church.

Pandulph attempts to stop the warfare, John now being back in the folds of the Church. The French will have none of it, and the forces clash at St. Edmundsbury. During the battle, a fallen French noble named Melun warns the turncoat English noblemen that the King of France will have them executed just as soon as John has been conquered. The nobles, seeing the winds of fortune shift, return their allegiance to King John. Without his allies, the French king comes to terms with Pandulph and John. John, however, will not be in a position to appreciate the victory—he is poisoned by one of the monks while staying at Swinstead Abbey. His son will ascend to the throne as King Henry III.



King John Character Breakdown:

Here is a brief description of the characters to be found in King John. This resource may be used as material for an introduction session to the play before a visit to a performance, or in conjunction with certain workshop suggestions (see individual workshops for more details).

Dramatis Personae:

The English Party:

- King John pg 8
- Prince Henry, son to the king pg 8
- Earl of Pembroke pg 8
- Earl of Essex pg 8
- Earl of Salisbury pg 8
- The Lord Bigot pg 8
- Hubert de Burgh pg 8
- Robert Faulconbridge pg 8
- Philip the Bastard, his half-brother pg 8
- James Gurney pg 9
- Peter of Pomfreet, a prophet pg 9
- Queen Eleanor, mother of King John pg 9
- Blanche of Spain, niece of King John pg 9
- Lady Falconbridge pg 9

The French Party:

- Arthur, Duke of Britain; nephew to King John pg 9
- Philip, King of France pg 9-10
- Lewis, the Dolphin pg 10
- Lymoges, Duke of Austria pg 10
- Melun, a French lord pg 10
- Chatillon, ambassador of France pg 10
- Constance, mother to Arthur pg 10

The Pope's Legate:

- Cardinal Pandulph, Papal legate pg 10

The English Party:

King John

- ~ son of Henry II & Eleanor of Aquitaine, claims the right to the English throne
- ~ goes to battle with France to support his claim
- ~ is heavily influenced by his mother and her death has a great effect on him
- ~ refuses to agree to the Pope's demands and is excommunicated as a result
- ~ complies with the Pope's wishes when England are loosing the battle
- ~ is finally poisoned by a priest and his son, Henry, becomes King

Prince Henry

- ~ John's son
- ~ becomes King Henry III at John's death
- ~ the lords all swear allegiance to him over his father's dead body

Pembroke

- ~ one of John's followers, Pembroke
- ~ switches sides when he believes Arthur has been killed on John's instruction
- ~ returns to John's side when he realises that Lewis has plans to execute him
- ~ swears allegiance to John's son, Henry, when John dies

Salisbury

- ~ one of John's followers, Pembroke
- ~ switches sides when he believes Arthur has been killed on John's instruction
- ~ returns to John's side when he realises that Lewis has plans to execute him
- ~ swears allegiance to John's son, Henry, when John dies

Hubert

- ~ pledges allegiance to John
- ~ is given charge of Arthur when he is taken prisoner
- ~ John asks Hubert to kill Arthur by burning his eyeballs out with a hot poker
- ~ when he comes to kill Arthur, he is persuaded by the boy not to do it
- ~ he lies to John about Arthur, but tells him the truth when the Lords revolt
- ~ when Arthur is found dead, he is blamed, but the bastard believes it wasn't him

Falconbridge

- ~ the Bastard's younger (legitimate) brother
- ~ claims his father willed his inheritance to him
- ~ claims his mother was unfaithful to his father hence his claim as legitimate heir
- ~ the Bastard possesses it legally because he is their mother's oldest son
- ~ Falconbridge regains the land when the Bastard forfeits it.

Philip The Bastard

- ~ not an historical character
- ~ illegitimate son of Richard the Lionhearted
- ~ claims inheritance from his father, but gives it up to become a knight
- ~ Philip is his real name, but is re-named after his father by John

- ~ becomes John's main supporter after all the king's lords abandon him
- ~ speaks directly to the audience, interpreting and analysing scenes
- ~ his honourable behaviour has made him look even better than John
- ~ he has a string of bad luck when he loses half his army
- ~ tries to declare war on Lewis even after peace has been declared

Eleanor

- ~ mother of John, Eleanor is fiercely ambitious
- ~ admits that John's claim is stronger in possession than right
- ~ likes the Bastard's style and invites him to join England's army as a knight
- ~ quarrels openly with Constance
- ~ is nearly captured by France, but is saved by the Bastard
- ~ John obviously trusts his mother's military skills
- ~ is killed by the French and this has a great effect on John

Blanche

- ~ the daughter of John's sister
- ~ joins her uncle on his missions. Blanche
- ~ the suggestion is made by Hubert that Lewis & Blanche should marry
- ~ she is willing to follow her uncle's command and marries Lewis
- ~ when France & England go to war, she owes loyalty to both parties
- ~ this causes her great distress, but she is forced to follow her husband

Lady Falconbridge

- ~ the Bastard & Falconbridge's mother
- ~ committed adultery / was seduced by Richard the Lionhearted
- ~ her oldest son, the Bastard, was therefore illegitimate
- ~ tries to defend her name but admits to the Bastard that he is illegitimate

The French Party:

Arthur

- ~ son of Constance and Geoffrey
- ~ claims heir to the throne via his (deceased) father's monarchy
- ~ presented as a helpless child by Shakespeare, though he was probably 17
- ~ is dominated by his mother, was enlists France's help in regaining the throne
- ~ doesn't really want to be a king, but doesn't have a choice
- ~ jumps to his death trying to escape execution on the orders of John

King Philip

- ~ enlisted by Constance and Arthur to assist them in defeating Arthur's uncle
- ~ is prepared to go to war for their cause
- ~ agrees to a union between his son, Lewis, & John's niece, Blanche
- ~ in doing so, he turns his back on Constance & Arthur
- ~ when Pandulph arrives, he turns his back on John and sides with his faith

- ~ once again, John and Philip become enemies and go to battle
- ~ tries (unsuccessfully) to console Constance when Arthur is taken prisoner

Lewis the Dolphin

- ~ son of King Philip of France
- ~ fights in the wars between France & England for Arthur
- ~ admits to being in love with Blanche & agrees to marry her
- ~ persuades his father to follow Pandulph rather than John
- ~ ignores his wife's pleas not to fight with England again
- ~ goes to England to fight and refuses to withdraw on Pandulph's orders

Melun

- ~ one of Louis's men
- ~ tips the English lords off after he is wounded
- ~ tells them Louis means to behead them if they beat John's army in the invasion

Chatillon

- ~ a messenger from France
- ~ speaks for Philip when he asks John to abdicate in favour of Arthur
- ~ prompts the first of the battles between the nations

Lymoges, Duke of Austria

- ~ one of Philip's men
- ~ he killed Richard I (the lion heart), Arthur's uncle
- ~ is prepared to fight with Philip to defend Arthur's right
- ~ is killed by the Bastard for killing Richard I during a battle

Constance

- ~ Arthur's mother whose first husband was Geoffrey Plantagnet
- ~ the driving force behind Arthur, to the point where she seems to dominate him
- ~ enlists the help of France to put her son on the throne
- ~ is furious at the marriage of Lewis & Blanche as France will no longer help her
- ~ praises Pandulph for cursing John and forcing Philip to go once more to war
- ~ is sent to the edge of madness by the capture & death of her son
- ~ eventually dies of despair

The Pope's Legate:

Pandulph

- ~ a messenger from the pope
- ~ is sent to ask John why he has resisted the pope's nomination for archbishop
- ~ John refuses to accept the Pope's wishes & Pandulph excommunicates John
- ~ he threatens to excommunicate Philip as well unless he breaks with John
- ~ he orders any catholic to murder John & joins with the French army
- ~ he urges Lewis fight the English & reminds him that he is a potential heir
- ~ when John accepts the pope's wishes he tries to stop the French army



Analysis of King John:

Unlike Shakespeare's earlier history plays, *King John* does not portray a providential movement of history, where everything happens for a reason on a predestined path to a moral conclusion. While the play focuses on some of the historical events of King John's reign, it also delivers less narrative drive than plays such as *Henry V*. Events in the plot disrupt the connection between intention and outcome throughout the play--the characters are continually thwarted by historical accident and adversity, making *King John* more a pragmatic representation of political events than a story shaped according to aesthetic ends.

The play dramatizes several topics which would have interested Shakespeare's contemporary audience: a struggle with the papacy, the danger of invasion, and the debate about legitimate rule. These same topics were hotly debated during Queen Elizabeth's reign. Yet *King John* differs from Shakespeare's other histories. It portrays the thirteenth century rather than the fourteenth or fifteenth, and unlike other history plays which were part of a series, this play stands alone. Other history plays focused attention on the balance of power between the nobility and the king, and gave account of popular unrest; this play, by contrast, completely marginalizes the populace and doesn't attribute much strength to the nobles.

The real focus of the play thus becomes the question of legitimacy and fitness to rule, which turns on the relationship between John and Arthur. The prior sovereign chose making John the rightful heir, but Arthur was legitimately the next in line to rule. In the case of the Bastard, though, John rules that a will cannot take precedence over the law; in that case, the father's will that his younger son receive the inheritance was overturned by the law which stated inheritance must go to the eldest son, bastard or not. By ruling such, John unwittingly proves his own illegitimate hold on the throne, since it is based on will and not the legal right of succession.

Shakespeare proves that John is not the legitimate ruler, yet the question is complicated in the clear difference that develops between the idea of "legitimate" and "fit." Arthur is the legitimate ruler, but his portrayal as a weak child under his mother's thumb shows him to be unfit; that is, he would be a weak and ineffectual king. Since John is a stronger man, his claim on the throne begins to seem much more attractive.

This all gives rise to a kind of defence of illegitimacy. Towards that end, the Bastard develops as the most compelling character in the play. He enters less as a character than as a set of theatrical functions, embodying the mischievous Vice figure of earlier English morality plays. He speaks to the audience and makes

observations about events. Yet by the second half of the play, he becomes unwaveringly loyal to the King, denouncing deals made between John and Philip, between John and Pandulf, and criticizing the royal desire for 'commodity' and self-interest. The Bastard seems to believe that Arthur's death was an accident, and returns to John to defend the crown and kingdom. At this point he becomes both the rhetorical and ethical centre of the play.

By supporting John, the heroic and honourable Bastard makes it look like John must be the right choice for king. But ordering the death of Arthur has tipped the balance between rightful rule and hereditary legitimacy in John's reign, and his unnecessary cruelty makes him seem unfit to rule. As the central argument is weakened, so is the hero of the play; the Bastard loses his armies in yet another watery grave, and he still wants to fight an irrelevant war with France after the others have already negotiated peace. He is not completely pushed aside--he makes the final speech of the play--but while he cheers on the unconquerable force of his nation, his resolution has less to do with victory than with the well-timed collapse of both opposing forces. And while he delights in England's power, he also notes that internal conflicts could yet doom the nation.



Context:

Here are some details that place King John historically and in terms of Shakespeare's work as a whole.

King John was written by William Shakespeare, who is likely the most influential writer in all of English literature, and certainly the most important playwright of the English Renaissance. The son of a successful glove-maker, Shakespeare was born in 1564 in Stratford-upon-Avon in northern England. He married in 1582 and had three children. Around 1590 he left his family behind and travelled to London to work as an actor and playwright. Both public and critical success quickly followed--his career bridged the reigns of Elizabeth I and James I, and he was a favourite of both monarchs. James paid Shakespeare and his company the greatest possible compliment by making them the king's players.

Shakespeare died in 1616 at the age of fifty-two, the author of 154 sonnets and 38 remarkable plays, some of which were not only inarguably brilliant, but so influential as to permanently change the course of English literature. From time to time controversies flare up about whether Shakespeare, a man of middling education and stature, could possibly be the author of such extraordinary literature. Many theories are forwarded, speculating that the plays were really authored by such diverse figures as Sir Francis Bacon or the Earl of Oxford. But in the absence of convincing proof that Shakespeare is not the author of the work credited to him, Shakespeare will continue to be assessed as one of the pre-eminent artists the human race has ever produced.

King John, a history play thought to have been written before 1596, presents a different view of English history than did Shakespeare's earliest history plays, which depicted the infighting among the royals during the War of the Roses. While King John focuses on actual historical events, it does not attribute any fundamental meaning or significance to King John's reign. Rather, it treats history as an unpredictable unfolding of events, where seemingly decisive moments become insignificant episodes in a haphazard universe.

Yet audiences who lived during Shakespeare's time may have found King John to be a reflection on the contemporary debate about royal legitimacy which surrounded the competing claims to the throne of Queen Elizabeth and Mary, Queen of Scots. The parallels between the play and these debates were numerous. For instance, John's claim to the throne is based on the will of Richard the Lionhearted, his elder brother and the prior king; Elizabeth's father Henry VIII made Elizabeth his heir by will, despite disputes about the legality of appointing successors. Both John and Elizabeth were excommunicated from the Catholic Church by the Pope.

John's rival to the throne, Arthur, was the son of John's elder brother, as Elizabeth's rival Mary was the daughter of Henry VIII's elder sister. Succession

usually passed to the offspring of the older child, so both John and Elizabeth's claims to the throne were weak. Arthur's cause was championed by King Philip of France, and Mary's claims were supported by foreign kings as well, including King Philip II of Spain. John orders Arthur's death yet tries to distance himself from it, just as Elizabeth ordered Mary's assassination and distanced herself from the murder. Arthur's death provides an excuse for a French invasion, as Mary's death provoked Philip II to launch the Spanish Armada. As England is saved by a storm that shipwrecks the French reinforcements, so storms saved England from the brunt of the Spanish Armada. To an extent, this list of parallels oversimplifies both theatre and history, but it nevertheless evokes the themes Shakespeare emphasized in this play, including the struggle with the pope, threat of invasion, and the problem of illegitimate rule.

Critics believe an earlier anonymous play, *The Troublesome Reign of John, King of England* (1591), was Shakespeare's primary source for *King John*. Both relied on Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland* (1587), a narrative of English history on which Shakespeare drew extensively throughout the 1590s for his history plays. John had been thought of as a proto-Protestant king who stood up to the pope, but Shakespeare toned down accounts of John's temporary resistance to the Roman Catholic Church. John emerges as a supporter of neither the Protestants nor the Catholics; he weakens the Catholic Church by pillaging the finances of the monasteries, but eventually he gives in to Rome.

King John was first published in the First Folio of 1623. That text is thought to go back to a manuscript from 1596 that was subsequently copied by scribes in 1609 and 1623. Scholars date the initial writing of this play to the period following the defeat of the Spanish Armada, and believe it was written after the anonymous play on the same topic. Examination of stage directions and other stylistic analysis suggests that the play was written around 1596.



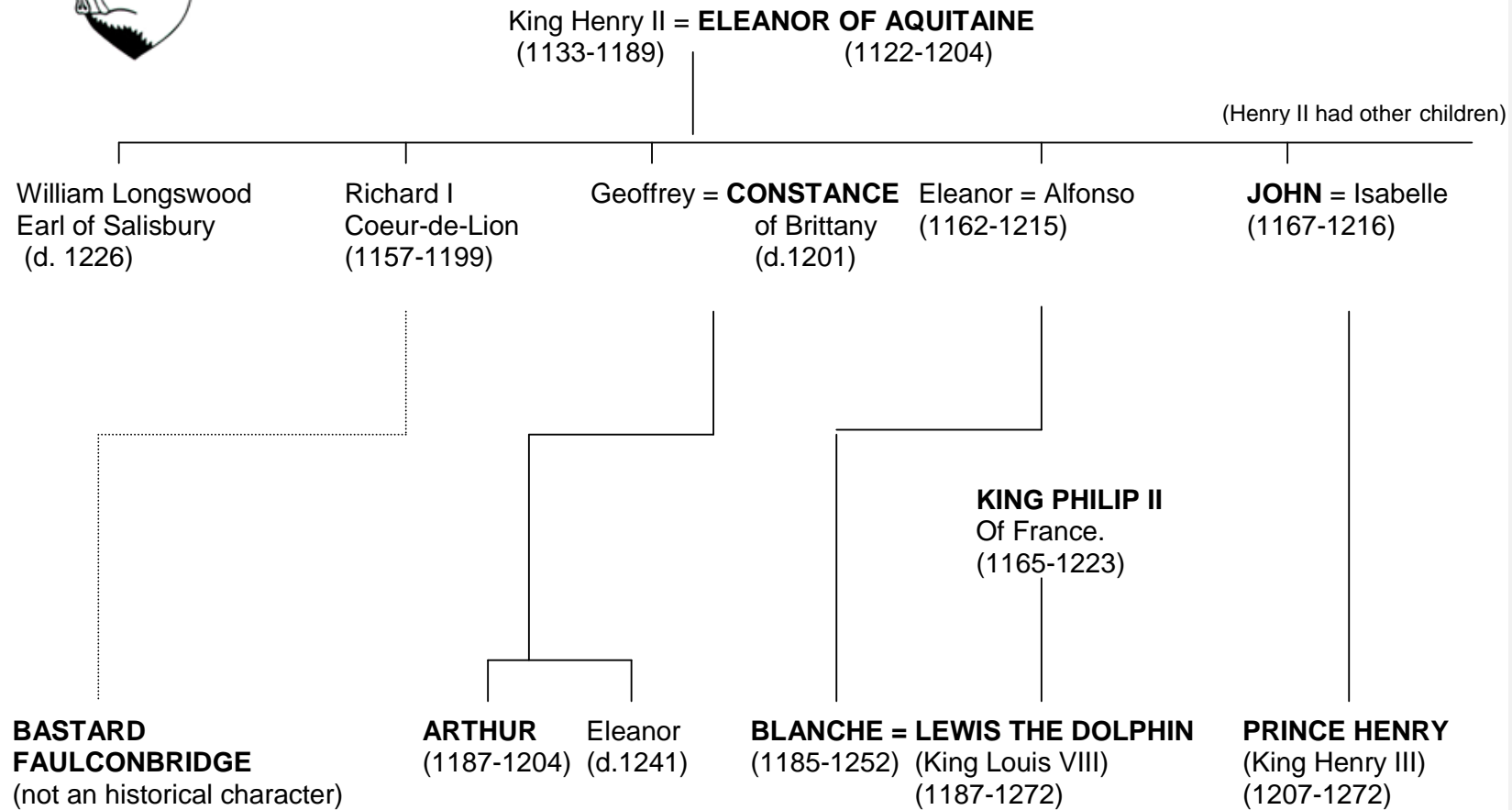
Essay Suggestions:

Here are some essay ideas. They do require knowledge of the play and may be useful as a follow-up exercise after seeing the performance. You may find it useful to look at the information on the play and the characters that are in this pack as an additional resource.

1. Consider the representation of events within this play. Do things seem to happen for a reason, or do they seem random? What do you think the sequence of events says about the unfolding of history?
2. Consider questions of legitimacy within this play, including John and the Bastard. What is the difference between law and will, and how does that differently affect each of their claims to legitimacy? What seems to be the play's prevailing suggestion about legitimacy?
3. 'Kingship in Shakespeare's plays is ultimately a fraud and never more fraudulent than when it disposes of the lives of men in pursuit of its own interest.' Do you think that kingship in King John is 'fraudulent'? If so, why?
4. Consider legitimacy versus ability in terms of a ruler's desirability, with particular reference to John and Arthur.
5. What is the role of the church in this play? Consider Pandolf and the monasteries.
6. Consider the Bastard's conclusion. He speaks of the unconquerable nation - unconquerable unless divided internally. To what do you think he refers? Is this a warning?
7. Discuss Arthur's fate; cheated out of the throne, browbeaten by his mother, captured, threatened with assassination, he escapes only to fall to his death. What kind of fate seems to be functioning in Arthur's world? Is his life a smaller version of the fate playing elsewhere in the play?
8. Consider the absence of actual battles in this play. Unlike other history plays, the battles take place offstage, or not at all, after much buildup. Why do you think this happens this way in this play?
9. Compare the Bastard with John. Focus on the Bastard's transformation through the play, and any changes John experiences. Does one end up looking better than the other? Why or why not?



Genealogical Table : The Family of Henry II



Characters in the play are written in **BOLD**. Dates are birth and death where known.



Teacher's Session Suggestions:

Introduction:

These sessions have all risen directly from our work during the rehearsal period of King John. I have tried to make them accessible to those who have little or no experience of Shakspeare's work and tried to include as much stimulus material without the need for buying expensive copies of the play.

Most of the sessions are designed to be run before you & your group make a visit to see our production of King John in order that they are already beginning to think about the play and the experience will hopefully resonate more productively for them. You may find it useful to go through the material on the previous pages before you begin a session. You will find specific requests for this in the descriptions of individual workshops.

I hope you find these sessions useful.

Contents:

Think of a Letter

- A creative writing exercise that involves examining sections of text (provided) and composing a letter from that stimulus.

Appropriating History

- An analytical exercise comparing history as represented in King John to historical fact and looking at the historical events in the time of Shakespeare that may have influenced his writing.

Design Dimensions

- A design session, looking at set and costume design in King John.

Before the Match be Played

- A movement exercise, focusing on Act 3, scene 1, looking at textual clues, dramatic effect and choreography.



Think of a Letter:

During the play, King John gives Hubert a letter instructing him to murder Arthur. One of the jobs of our Company Manager is to write out the letter as a prop for performance. Sometimes in Shakespeare, the letter is written in the script, but in King John, we are having to compose it ourselves.

Purpose:

For a group that is not studying King John as a set text, this is a quick way of getting them engaged with the text. It also gives them an insight into the numerous tasks members of theatre companies have to do whilst preparing for a performance.

Estimated Time:

30mins + discussion time

Task:

To read through the following extracts and compose King John's letter to Hubert, instructing him to execute Arthur.

Points of discussion:

- As John is a king, he will use a regal tone in his orders. Think about the language of the monarchy, the 'royal we', the tone of the language when addressing (inferior) subjects etc.
- As Hubert is simply John's subject, he has no choice but to carry out the King's demands. How might this affect the content of the letter?
- In the first extract, the language used by both men is very minimal compared to the flowing poetry of the rest of the play. Why do you think this is? Would these factors influence the content of John's letter?
- Have the group studied any texts where letters (or similar) are mentioned though not prescribed. Compare the different scenarios and different reasons for having the letters.
- Think about the time that the play is set in. How would this affect the style, content and delivery of the letter?
- In the first extract, John is rather hesitant in his request to Hubert & goes on to change his mind about the execution. Would these factors influence the manner in which John asks Hubert to carry out the execution?

Measuring the success:

Did the students respond creatively to the given stimulus? Did they adopt the language that would be used by a King? Did they think further than the given text?

Think of a Letter:

- K. John:** Good Hubert, Hubert, Hubert, throw thine eye
On yon young boy; I'll tell thee what, my friend,
He is a very serpent in my way;
And wheresoe'er the foot of mine doth tread,
He lies before me: dost thou understand me?
Thou art his keeper.
Hub: And I'll keep him so
That he doth not offend your majesty.
K. John: Death.
Hub: My lord?
K. John: A grave.
Hub: He shall not live.
K. John: Enough.
(Act III, sc. ii, 69-75)
- Hub.** Read here, young Arthur. [*Showing a paper.*
[*Aside.*] How now, foolish rheum!
Turning despiteous torture out of door!
I must be brief, lest resolution drop
Out at mine eyes in tender womanish tears.
Can you not read it? is it not fair writ?
Arth. Too fairly, Hubert, for so foul effect.
Must you with hot irons burn out both mine eyes?
Hub. Young boy, I must.
Arth. And will you?
Hub. And I will.
(Act IV, sc. i, 32 – 40)
- K. John.** Why seek'st thou to possess me with these fears?
Why urgest thou so oft young Arthur's death?
Thy hand hath murder'd him: I had a mighty cause
To wish him dead, but thou hadst none to kill him.
Hub. No had, my lord! why, did you not provoke me?
K. John. It is the curse of kings to be attended
By slaves that take their humours for a warrant
To break within the bloody house of life,
And on the winking of authority
To understand a law, to know the meaning
Of dangerous majesty, when, perchance, it frowns
More upon humour than advis'd respect.
Hub. Here is your hand and seal for what I did.
K. John. O! when the last account 'twixt heaven and earth
Is to be made, then shall this hand and seal
Witness against us to damnation.
(Act IV, sc. ii, 204-218)

Glossary:

rheum = tears
dispiteous = merciless
fair writ = clearly written
humour = moodiness



Appropriating History

Audiences who lived during Shakespeare's time may have found *King John* to be a reflection on the contemporary debate about royal legitimacy which surrounded the competing claims to the throne of Queen Elizabeth and Mary, Queen of Scots. The parallels between the play and these debates were numerous. For instance, John's claim to the throne is based on the will of Richard the Lionhearted, his elder brother and the prior king; Elizabeth's father Henry VIII made Elizabeth his heir by will, despite disputes about the legality of appointing successors. Both John and Elizabeth were excommunicated from the Catholic Church by the Pope.

Purpose:

This exercise can be a very immediate way of thinking about the historical setting of *King John* and looking at the events that may have influenced his work. It also meets certain requirements of G.C.S.E English Literature, if you need to justify running the session.

Estimated Time:

45mins + discussion time

Task:

Read through the lists below and identify events in John's reign that Shakespeare included in his play and those he did not. Try to think of reasons why Shakespeare included and excluded certain events.

Points of discussion:

- Why would Shakespeare choose to base a play on an historical story? Think about the fact that audiences would already know the ending to the play. How is this similar to using a well-know myth as a model for a play?
- Why do you think Shakespeare chose to ignore the whole tale of the Magna Carta - an event that had a massive influence on British politics?
- If you were writing a history play today, what era would you focus on and why? What parallels would you draw between this period and our own?
- In *King John* the English lords dislike John's decision to execute Arthur and in effect, force him to change his mind. Can you think of any events that have happened recently where the populace forced the monarchy to reverse their judgement – for example Princess Diana's funeral - ?

Measuring the success:

Have your students recognised how Shakespeare was able to bring into focus current events through his use of historical models? Were they able to respond creatively to the given stimulus?

**Events in the Reign of
King John
1199-1216**

1199: John accedes to the throne on the death of Richard.

1204: England loses almost all its possessions in France.

1206: John refuses to accept Stephen Langton as Archbishop of Canterbury.

1208: Pope Innocent III issues an Interdict against all England banning all church services except baptisms and funerals.

1209: Pope Innocent III declares that John is no longer the rightful king of England.

1213: John submits to the Pope's demands.

1214: Philip Augustus of France defeats the army at the battle of Bouvines.

1214: The English Barons at Bury St Edmunds to discuss the demands they wish to make on the king.

1215: The Pope decrees that John need not adhere to Magna Carta and civil war breaks out.

1216: The barons seek French aid in their fight against John; Prince Louis of France captures the Tower of London.

1216: John loses his war chest of cash and jewels in the wash.

1216: John dies at Newark and is buried in Worcester Cathedral.

**Events in Shakespeare's
King John
Written approx 1590**

France accuses John of being a usurper and ask him to step down as king of England in place of Arthur.

On John's refusal, France and England go to war.

Blanche (John's niece) and Lewis of France marry forming a peace treaty.

John is excommunicated from the Catholic church causing the war between Catholic France and excommunicate England to resume.

France sail over to England but loose much of their army in the fighting.

John submits to the Pope's demands when England are loosing the war in the hope that this will calm Catholic France.

John secretly orders Arthur's execution to secure his reign.

The lords are outraged and rebel, joining the French army under Lewis (Louis) the Dolphin.

Lewis will not agree to the church's request for a cease-fire. Rumours that he will execute the English Lords cause them to return to John.

John is poisoned by a monk and dies, leaving his son, Henry as heir to the throne.

The English loose much of their army and treasure at sea due to bad weather.

**Events in the Reign of
Queen Elizabeth I
1558-1603**

1558: Elizabeth accedes to the throne on the death of her half-sister Mary who had usurped Lady Jane Grey's reign of 9 days in 1553.

1559: Act of Supremacy makes Elizabeth head of the Church of England.

1562: Elizabeth gives aid to the Protestant Huguenots in the French Wars of Religion.

1563-4: 17,000 die of the plague in London.

1568: Mary Queen of Scots, a staunch Catholic, flees to England from Scotland and is imprisoned by the Protestant Elizabeth.

1586-7: Mary Queen of Scots is sent to trial and executed.

1587: Drake attacks the Spanish fleet in Cadiz Harbour.

1588: The English navy and bad weather defeat Spanish Armada.

1601: Earl of Essex is executed for leading a revolt against Elizabeth's government.



Design Dimensions:

King John is a relatively difficult play to follow when you simply read it – after all, it was written to be performed. In performance, there are a number of ways in which we utilise visual elements in order to assist the audience (and ourselves at times!) in following the plot.

Purpose:

This exercise is designed to encourage students to think about a written text in a visual dimension. It also gives them an insight into the kind of textual clues that our designer must pick up on in order to create a look for the play.

Estimated Time:

1hr + discussion time.

Tools:

Coloured pens or pencils will be needed and plenty of paper for drawing.

Task:

Read through the the play synopsis and character analyses. Pick out any textual clues that would assist in designing the set, costume and/or props.

Points of Discussion:

- What are the purposes of visual design in terms of audiences? Think about how design can assist in making the play clear and understandable.
- Think about the action in the play. The English and the French both have armies and battles take place. How would this affect the overall design idea? How would you distinguish between those in power (the kings) and their subjects?
- Though the play is set historically in the 13th century, do you think it is therefore necessary to design sets and costumes in the style of this period? Would you choose a different period or design a look that could be timeless?
- In our designs, one of the main points to bear in mind is that we are a touring theatre company and so sets, costumes and props have to be transported between various locations. How would this affect you designs?

Measuring the success:

Did the students respond visually to the text? Were they able to 'visualise' the final product? Do you feel that they were able to respond to the text in a practical way?



'Before the Match be Played' Designing Movement:

On the stage, movement becomes an essential part of performing King John. There are often many characters on stage at the same time, and so the movement has to be strictly choreographed to avoid total chaos!

Purpose:

This exercise asks students to look at the text in terms of movement. This will require a more detailed examination of the text provided than some of the other sessions and asks students to think carefully about how the text could be realised on stage.

Estimated Time:

60-90mins + discussion time.

Tools:

Copies of the text (provided and split into 6 sections so small groups can work together), pen and paper (squared if possible), pieces to use as characters.

Task:

Read through the sections aloud so students become familiar with the whole scene. Organise the students into groups of 4-5 and give them the paper, pieces and script. Ask them to read aloud their script, stopping after *each speech* to decide what gestures and movements the characters make as they say their lines.

Points of Discussion:

- What kind of clues could be found in the script, e.g. '*Blanche*: each having a hand.'? How would you visualise this line?
- What impact can movement have on the meaning of sections? Experiment with a few different ways of choreographing a section and assess the variety of impacts that can be achieved.
- Think about the status of each character (it may be useful to look at the character sketches). How would this affect their position on the stage and/or that character's movements?
- Has the group looked at different dramatic styles? How could they 'stylise' the piece? What effect would this have on the interpretation of the section?

Measuring the Success:

Did the groups engage with the text? Were they able to express their ideas within the group and work together? Did they experiment with different methods before deciding on one or another?

On Stage: KING JOHN, KING PHILIP, LEWIS, BLANCH, ELEANOR, *the BASTARD*, DUKE OF AUSTRIA, CONSTANCE, ARTHUR *and* Attendants.

K. Phi. 'Tis true, fair daughter; and this blessed day
Ever in France shall be kept festival:
To solemnize this day the glorious sun
Stays in his course and plays the alchemist,
Turning with splendour of his precious eye
The meagre cloddy earth to glittering gold:
The yearly course that brings this day about
Shall never see it but a holiday.

Const. [*Rising.*] A wicked day, and not a holy day!
What hath this day deserv'd? what hath it done
That it in golden letters should be set
Among the high tides in the calendar?
Nay, rather turn this day out of the week,
This day of shame, oppression, perjury:
This day all things begun come to ill end;
Yea, faith itself to hollow falsehood change!

K. Phi. By heaven, lady, you shall have no cause
To curse the fair proceedings of this day:
Have I not pawn'd to you my majesty?

Const. You have beguil'd me with a counterfeit
Resembling majesty, which, being touch'd and tried,
Proves valueless: you are forsworn, forsworn;
You came in arms to spill mine enemies' blood,
But now in arms you strengthen it with yours:
Arm, arm, you heavens, against these perjurd kings!
Hear me! O, hear me!

Aust. Lady Constance, peace!

Const. War! war! no peace! peace is to me a war.
O, Austria! thou dost shame that bloody spoil what a fool art thou,
To brag, and stamp and swear upon my party!
Thou wear a lion's hide! doff it for shame,
And hang a calf's-skin on those recreant limbs.

Aust. O! that a man should speak those words to me.

Bast. And hang a calf's-skin on those recreant limbs.

Aust. Thou dar'st not say so, villain, for thy life.

Bast. And hang a calf's-skin on those recreant limbs.

K. John. We like not this; thou dost forget thyself.

(Act 3, scene 2)

On Stage: KING JOHN, KING PHILIP, LEWIS, BLANCH, ELEANOR, *the* BASTARD, DUKE OF AUSTRIA, CONSTANCE, ARTHUR *and* Attendants.

Enter PANDULPH.

Pand. Hail, you anointed deputies of heaven!
To thee, King John, my holy errand is.
I Pandulph, of fair Milan cardinal,
And from Pope Innocent the legate here,
Do in his name religiously demand
Why thou against the church, our holy mother,
So wilfully dost spurn; and, force perforce,
Keep Stephen Langton, chosen Archbishop
Of Canterbury, from that holy see?
This, in our foresaid holy father's name,
Pope Innocent, I do demand of thee.

K. John. Thou canst not, cardinal, devise a name
So slight, unworthy and ridiculous,
To charge me to an answer, as the pope.
Tell him this tale; that no Italian priest
Shall tithe or toll in our dominions;
But as we under heaven are supreme head,
So under him that great supremacy,
Where we do reign, we will alone uphold,
Without the assistance of a mortal hand:
So tell the pope; all reverence set apart
To him, and his usurp'd authority.

K. Phi. Brother of England, you blaspheme in this.

K. John. Though you and all the kings of Christendom
Are led so grossly by this meddling priest,
Dreading the curse that money may buy out;
Who in that sale sells pardon from himself;
Though you and all the rest so grossly led
This juggling witchcraft with revenue cherish;
Yet I alone, alone do me oppose
Against the pope, and count his friends my foes.

Pand. Then, by the lawful power that I have,
Thou shalt stand curs'd and excommunicate:
And blessed shall he be that doth revolt
From his allegiance to a heretic;
And meritorious shall that hand be call'd,
Canonized and worshipp'd as a saint,
That takes away by any secret course
Thy hateful life.

(Act 3, scene 2)

On Stage: KING JOHN, KING PHILIP, LEWIS, BLANCH, ELEANOR, *the* BASTARD, DUKE OF AUSTRIA, CONSTANCE, ARTHUR *and* Attendants.

Const. O! lawful let it be
That I have room with Rome to curse awhile.
Good father cardinal, cry thou amen
To my keen curses; for without my wrong
There is no tongue hath power to curse him right.

Pand. There's law and warrant, lady, for my curse.

Const. And for mine too: when law can do no right,
Let it be lawful that law bar no wrong.
Law cannot give my child his kingdom here,
For he that holds his kingdom holds the law:
Therefore, since law itself is perfect wrong,
How can the law forbid my tongue to curse?

Pand. Philip of France, on peril of a curse,
Let go the hand of that arch-heretic,
And raise the power of France upon his head,
Unless he do submit himself to Rome.

Elea. Look'st thou pale, France? do not let go thy hand.

Const. Look to that, devil, lest that France repent,
And by disjoining hands, hell lose a soul.

Aust. King Philip, listen to the cardinal.

Bast. And hang a calf's-skin on his recreant limbs.

Aust. Well, ruffian, I must pocket up these wrongs,
Because—

Bast. Your breeches best may carry them.

K. John. Philip, what sayst thou to the cardinal?

Const. What should he say, but as the cardinal?

Lew. Bethink you, father; for the difference
Is purchase of a heavy curse from Rome,
Or the light loss of England for a friend:
Forego the easier.

Blanch. That's the curse of Rome.

Const. O Lewis, stand fast! the devil tempts thee here,
In likeness of a new untrimmed bride.

Blanch. The Lady Constance speaks not from her faith,
But from her need.

(Act 3, scene 2)

On Stage: KING JOHN, KING PHILIP, LEWIS, BLANCH, ELEANOR, *the* BASTARD, DUKE OF AUSTRIA, CONSTANCE, ARTHUR *and* Attendants.

K. John. The king is mov'd, and answers not to this.

Const. O! be remov'd from him, and answer well.

Aust. Do so, King Philip: hang no more in doubt.

Bast. Hang nothing but a calf's-skin, most sweet lout.

K. Phi. I am perplex'd, and know not what to say.

Pand. What canst thou say but will perplex thee more,
If thou stand excommunicate and curs'd?

K. Phi. Good reverend father, make my person yours,
And tell me how you would bestow yourself.
Shall these hands, so lately purg'd of blood,
So newly join'd in love, so strong in both,
Unyoke this seizure and this kind regreet?
Play fast and loose with faith? O! holy sir,
My reverend father, let it not be so!
Out of your grace, devise, ordain, impose
Some gentle order, and then we shall be bless'd
To do your pleasure and continue friends.

Pand. All form is formless, order orderless,
Save what is opposite to England's love.
Therefore to arms! be champion of our church,
Or let the church, our mother, breathe her curse,
A mother's curse, on her revolting son.
France, thou mayst hold a serpent by the tongue,
A chafed lion by the mortal paw,
A fasting tiger safer by the tooth,
Than keep in peace that hand which thou dost hold.

K. Phi. I may disjoin my hand, but not my faith.

Pand. So mak'st thou faith an enemy to faith:
And like a civil war sett'st oath to oath,
Thy tongue against thy tongue. O! let thy vow
First made to heaven, first be to heaven perform'd;
That is, to be the champion of our church.
It is religion that doth make vows kept;
Upon which better part our prayers come in,
If thou vouchsafe them; but, if not, then know
The peril of our curses light on thee
So heavy as thou shalt not shake them off,
But in despair die under their black weight.

Aust. Rebellion, flat rebellion!

Bast. Will't not be?
Will not a calf's-skin stop that mouth of thine?

(Act 3, scene 2)

On Stage: KING JOHN, KING PHILIP, LEWIS, BLANCH, ELEANOR, *the* BASTARD, DUKE OF AUSTRIA, CONSTANCE, ARTHUR *and* Attendants.

Lew. Father, to arms!

Blanch. Upon thy wedding-day?
Against the blood that thou hast married?
What! shall our feast be kept with slaughter'd men?
Shall braying trumpets and loud churlish drums,
Clamours of hell, be measures to our pomp?
O husband, hear me! ay, alack! how new
Is husband in my mouth; even for that name,
Which till this time my tongue did ne'er pronounce,
Upon my knee I beg, go not to arms
Against mine uncle.

Const. O! upon my knee,
Made hard with kneeling, I do pray to thee,
Thou virtuous Dauphin, alter not the doom
Forethought by heaven.

Blanch. Now shall I see thy love: what motive may
Be stronger with thee than the name of wife?

Const. That which upholdeth him that thee upholds,
His honour: O! thine honour, Lewis, thine honour.

Lew. I muse your majesty doth seem so cold,
When such profound respects do pull you on.

Pand. I will denounce a curse upon his head.

K. Phi. Thou shalt not need. England, I'll fall from thee.

Const. O fair return of banish'd majesty!

Elea. O foul revolt of French inconstancy!

K. John. France, thou shalt rue this hour within this hour.

Bast. Old Time the clock-setter, that bald sexton Time,
Is it as he will? well then, France shall rue.

(Act 3, scene 2)

On Stage: KING JOHN, KING PHILIP, LEWIS, BLANCH, ELEANOR, *the* BASTARD, DUKE OF AUSTRIA, CONSTANCE, ARTHUR *and* Attendants.

Blanch. The sun's o'er cast with blood: fair day, adieu!
Which is the side that I must go withal?
I am with both: each army hath a hand;
And in their rage, I having hold of both,
They whirl asunder and dismember me.
Husband, I cannot pray that thou mayst win;
Uncle, I needs must pray that thou mayst lose;
Father, I may not wish the fortune thine;
Grandam, I will not wish thy wishes thrive:
Whoever wins, on that side shall I lose;
Assured loss before the match be play'd.

Lew. Lady, with me; with me thy fortune lies.

Blanch. There where my fortune lives, there my life dies.

K. John. Cousin, go draw our puissance together. [*Exit* BASTARD.
France, I am burn'd up with inflaming wrath;
A rage whose heat hath this condition,
That nothing can allay, nothing but blood,
The blood, and dearest-valu'd blood of France.

K. Phi. Thy rage shall burn thee up, and thou shalt turn
To ashes, ere our blood shall quench that fire:
Look to thyself, thou art in jeopardy.

K. John. No more than he that threatens. To arms let's hie! [*Exeunt.*

(Act 3, scene 2)

Northern Broadsides
King John Education Pack



Feed-back Form:

We would find it more than useful if you could take a few minutes to complete the form below. In doing so, you will help us to continue to provide you with a dynamic and stimulating resource.

1. Have you been to see our production of King John? If so, where and when?
2. How did you find out about our Education work?
Reviews Advertising Local Theatre Other
3. Did you make use of the teacher's session ideas? If so, which ones?
 - ~ Think of a letter
 - ~ Appropriating History
 - ~ Design Dimensions
 - ~ Before the Match be Played
4. Did you find them useful? Please give details:

5. Did you take part in any Northern Broadsides Education work – visiting workshop, talks, in-house workshops? If so, when and where?

6. Would you take part in future education programmes run by Northern Broadsides?

7. Did you download the education pack from our web site? If so, would you say that the ease of availability and lack of cost made you more inclined to take part in our education programme?

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