

Richard III: A Handy Guide to Homicide

This quick guide can help students keep track of who is who in Shakespeare's *Richard III*. I list the victims below in chronological order of their assassinations along with the means and motivations for each killing. Note that there are several Henrys, Richards, Edwards, and Elizabeths, which can be a bit confusing. Richard of Gloucester is the hunchbacked monster who becomes King Richard III before the end of the play. I refer to him as Richard of Gloucester during the murders before his crowning, and as Richard III during the murders after his crowning. Use this handout in conjunction with the genealogy in the Course Packet if you get confused.

- A: King Henry VI** (Lady Anne's mentally ill father-in-law): This murder takes place off stage before the play begins, but Richard of Gloucester confesses to the crime in Act I, Scene ii, line 154 and again in Act I, Scene ii, line 230. **Means:** Richard of Gloucester stabbed him repeatedly, according to the ghost's words in Act V, scene iii. **Motive:** unstated, though it is the death of this Lancastrian king and his son that lets the throne pass over to the Yorkists (King Edward IV) and marks the worst part of the War of the Roses between the houses of Lancaster and York. Richard also speaks of this murder as an entertainment to while away the time.
- B: Edward, the Elder Prince of Wales** (Lady Anne's husband): This Edward is the son of King Henry VI and the French Margaret of Anjou. This murder takes place off stage before the play begins, but Richard confesses to the crime when he confesses to Henry VI's murder. This Edward is not the same Edward as King Edward IV, or the ten-year old Prince Edward who appears later in the play as King Edward V, nor is it the same Edward who is the son of George, Duke of Clarence, nor is it the same Edward the Black Prince referred to by other characters. This Edward has no role at all in the play except for Richard and Anne's references to him as a past victim. **Means:** Richard of Gloucester stabbed this Edward during the battle of Tewkesbury according to the ghost's words in Act V, scene iii. **Motive:** as above.
- C: George, Duke of Clarence:** Usually referred to as "Clarence" by Richard III. George of Clarence, Richard of Gloucester, and Edward IV are brothers. (All three are sons of the elder Duke Richard of York--not be confused with Richard of Gloucester and the Duchess of York.) Richard first schemes to have George of Clarence framed for treason and imprisoned, hoping that King Edward IV will execute him. When King Edward forgives his brother and issues a pardon, Richard of Gloucester hires two murderers to race off to the tower and kill George, Duke of Clarence, before the paperwork to release him can arrive. **Means:** Richard hires two murderers, who stab George twice and drown him in a barrel of malmsey wine. **Motive:** Richard uses this death to destroy King Edward IV's precarious health and he places blame on Queen Elizabeth (King Edward IV's wife) and her family. Richard may possibly be doing this as a pre-emptive strike, since George would be the one next in line for the throne after Richard of Gloucester.
- D and E: The Two Murderers:** Two murderers kill George of Clarence to gain a reward, but then promptly and mysteriously vanish from the play without claiming their money. **Means:** Unknown. **Motive:** It has been suggested that, after they commit the crime, Richard discretely arranges an "accident" for them, though there is little textual evidence to support this theory beyond their sudden disappearance.
- F: King Edward IV:** The hypochondriac eldest son of the elder Duke of York. He is not technically murdered, but he dies of a broken heart and stress when Richard tricks him into feeling responsible for George of Clarence's death.
- G: Edward, Prince of Wales, afterward King Edward V:** The eldest son of King Edward IV, he is locked up in the tower with his younger brother at Richard of Gloucester's orders. **Means:** Richard sends Tyrol (sometimes spelled Tyrrel) to kill his two nephews, Edward V and his younger brother little Richard. In turn, Tyrol hires two other assassins to do the deed. **Motive:** These murders mean that King Edward IV will have no more male heirs left, and thus the throne will pass to Richard III as the brother of the king.
- H: Richard, Duke of York:** The youngest son of King Edward IV, he is locked up in the tower along with his older brother, Edward V. **Means:** Richard III sends Tyrol (sometimes spelled Tyrrel) to kill his two nephews, Edward V and his younger brother little Richard. **Motive:** Richard of Gloucester has Tyrol kill his namesake to eliminate the last male heir in the house of York besides himself.
- I: Hastings:** Richard III has Hastings' head chopped off at Richard III's orders when Hastings questions Richard III's decisions. **Means:** decapitation. **Motive:** an assertion of Richard III's power, and the timely removal of a person who might snitch or change sides.
- J, K, L, and M: Buckingham, Rivers, Grey, and Vaughan:** Minor knights and lords whom Richard orders executed or who die in battle as a result of Richard's machinations. Their ghosts come to haunt him the night before the battle of Bosworth Field, implying he is indeed responsible for their deaths either directly or indirectly.

Richard III also orders the death of **George Stanley** (the son of the Earl of Derby), and threatens directly or indirectly **Lady Elizabeth** and **Margaret**, though these deaths do not come to pass in the course of the play.

Folks who suspect Richard: The **Duchess of York:** She was married to the deceased elder Richard of York, who does not appear in this play. Richard of Gloucester (i.e. King Richard III), King Edward IV, and George of Clarence are her sons. She suspects Richard and denounces him.

Queen Margaret of Anjou: the widow of Henry VI, and mother of Edward the Elder Prince of Wales. This Edward is the prince that Richard of Gloucester kills off-stage before the play begins. She has no other children.

Lady Elizabeth: Wife of King Edward IV, and mother of the two princes locked up in the tower. She also mothers Margaret of York, whom Richard III desires as a replacement for Lady Anne (the same Margaret Henry Richmond marries).

Henry Tudor of Richmond: Our golden boy, a Welsh nobleman who leads the revolt against Richard III; historically, he is the grandfather of Queen Elizabeth Tudor, Shakespeare's queen.

Lady Anne: Widow of Edward Prince of Wales, daughter-in-law to King Henry VI. She marries Richard of Gloucester in spite of his murders.