STUDY MATERIALS FOR

KING JOHN

By
William Shakespeare

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Study materials written by
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Southwest Shakespeare presents King John

The timeliness of Shakespeare's history plays perpetually surprises us. How could he know so much about medieval England, his own Renaissance English court, and our political scene over 400 years later? Such a question can only be answered by trying to define "dramatic genius."

As Shakespeare portrays them, the machinations of power work with fearsome fascination, ambition wrestling with justice, principle with profit, right with opportunity, and every side claiming the sanction of the divine. If The West Wing and The Game of Thrones lure us, think how compelling the history plays must have been to Shakespeare's contemporaries. It let them peek into the great halls and private meetings of the great and see, for better or worse, how events happen and decisions are made.

Amid Shakespeare's ten English history plays, King John stands alone. It is the only history play of the nine he writes in the 1590s that does not treat the deposition/usurpation of Richard II and its long, contentious aftermath in 15th-century civil wars that ended in Tudor rule. It treats history two centuries earlier, yet every time it takes the boards, it proves its appeal.

King John narrates a taffy-pull of politics, king against king, lords against lords, the church against rulers, everyone leveraging the moment based on what the Renaissance called commodity and we call self-interest. The play also gives us someone to identify with, an everyman figure, Philip Faulconbridge, a.k.a. Richard Plantagenet, an outsider who finds himself inside the halls of power and their perils and whose insightful views we get to share.

So get ready for the throne room, the battlefield, the negotiation table, and the torture chamber, for King John offers us the thrill of making hard choices in the real world of 13th-century politics.

Notice that the action of the picture continues outside the indicated frame. Does Shakespeare also use this technique with the commentary of his character Philip Faulconbridge, the Bastard?

And how much of the war in the play is internal as well as external? Or a war of values?
The study materials provide several units focused on an awareness and assessment of history, literature, language, and performance that support Arizona Common Core Standards. All the activities can be adapted to serve as either discussion points—many either pre-show or post-show—or as writing prompts and can fit the specific critical focus or methods your students respond to best. Some can also serve as the basis for staging or for additional research.

- **Unit 1**: the historical context from both the 13th century in which King John reigned and the late 16th century in which Shakespeare wrote the play, with relevant analysis and activities
- **Unit 2**: literary analysis of structure and character choices in terms of issues/values
- **Unit 3**: textual detail/working with language
- **Topics for analysis and discussion, boxed in yellow**

### Arizona State Standards and the Materials

These study materials will help teachers create lesson plans that support the following Arizona Common Core Standards:

- Cite a strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says (9-10.RL.1, 11-12.RL.1) through class discussion prompts, writing prompts, and staging activities.
- Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text (9-10.RL.2, 11-12.RL.2) through class discussion prompts and writing prompts.
- Analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful (9-10.RL.4, 11-12.RL.4) through writing prompts and the staging activity on Shakespeare’s rhetoric.
- Analyze multiple interpretations of a story, drama, or poem … evaluating how each version interprets the source text (11-12.RL.7) through class discussion prompts, staging activities, and seeing the Southwest Shakespeare production. (The talkback can also support this goal.)
- Use prewriting strategies to generate ideas, editing and rewriting (9-10.W.5, 11-12.W.5) through writing prompts.
- Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research (9-10.RL.3, 11-12.RL.3) through class discussion, writing prompts, and staging activities.
- Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussion, respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives, summarize points or agreement and disagreement (9-10.SL.1, 11-12.SL.1) through class discussion prompts and staging activities.
- Demonstrate effective speaking skills and behaviors for a variety of formal and informal purposes (9-10.SL.4, 11-12.SL.4) through class discussion and staging activities.
- Analyze, integrate, and evaluate accounts of a subject told in different mediums in order to address a question or solve problems. (9-10.RL.7, 11-12.RL.7)
- Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis and draw inference. (9-10.RL.1, 11-12.RL.1)

### Opportunities in Assessing Performance

Because the play’s rhetoric relies on argumentative persuasion, the following learning opportunities may apply: *(Theatre standards)*

- Demonstrate effective listening skills for a variety of purposes, and demonstrate understanding by critically evaluating and analyzing oral presentations. [What do we learn about the characters by the way they speak and what they say?] *(Theatre-S3:C2:PO101, S3:C2:PO203)*
- [Assess the] use of appropriate eye contact, body movements, and voice register for audience engagement in formal and informal speaking situations. [How does the actor embody and particularize the character and to what effect? How does the character behave privately and publicly?] *(Theatre - S3:C2:PO202)*
- Think critically about staging issues and how to translate Shakespeare’s works from the page to the stage. [How are the large crowd scenes made clear so the relationships, action, and characterization develop appropriately? How are smaller private moments within large scenes handled? How are smaller scenes used in the play? How is the pace of the action adjusted or maintained?] *(Theatre – S3:C4:PO206, S3:C5:PO301)*

### Opportunities for Creation

The following learning opportunities to evaluate and relate to the material through visual arts may apply: *(Visual Arts standards)*

- Create Original artworks that communicate substantive meanings and achieve intended purposes *(Visual Arts-S1:C4:PO302, S1:C4:PO401)*
- Reflect upon cultural factors influencing artwork *(Visual Arts-S1:C4:PO402)*
- Create an artwork that serves a function *(Visual Arts-S1:C4:PO202)*
"Mad world, mad kings, mad composition!"

Fact Sheet for

**Genre:** English history play

**Date of Composition:** 1590-91 or 1594-95.
Recent scholars argue it is one of Shakespeare's earliest plays; another view puts it after *Richard III* and preceding *Richard II*. It shares a scheming, ruthless monarch, powerful, articulate women, and politically involved clerics with *Richard III*, but it is unclear whether it anticipates or offers twists on those potent characterizations.

**Source:** The play is somehow related to the 1591 anonymous play *The Troublesome Reign of King John*—which takes an anti-Catholic view of John's heroic stand against a corrupt church and is laced with low comedy—and which is either a bad quarto of Shakespeare's play or its source.

**Length:** 2659 lines, all in verse (a rarity in Shakespeare's canon). It has 16 scenes, of which 46% of the lines are in the first three large scenes, after which the action develops through 13 shorter scenes.

**Time and Setting:** The reign of King John of England, 1199-1216. The action takes place at court and on battlefields in southern England and northern France.

**Longest Roles in Play:** Philip Faulconbridge (520 lines), John, and Constance.
Thus, as with Falstaff in *Henry IV, Parts One and Two*, the ironic commentator has the most lines, not the monarch. In fact, the title monarch has the most lines in only four of the history plays: *Richard III, Richard II, Henry V, and Henry VIII*.

**Plot:** King John's right to the English crown is challenged by the French king, Philip II, acting for Prince Arthur, son of John's late older brother Geoffrey. Their battle ends with a truce and a royal wedding that benefits the kings and cuts Arthur out.

A church legate, Pandulph, arrives and, when John will not submit to the Pope's wishes, he excommunicates him. The legate urges King Philip to continue the war—during which John captures Arthur—and then incites the French Dauphin to invade England with promises of ruling it.

John orders Arthur's murder, which Hubert refuses to enact, but the English lords in outrage abandon John when given false news of Arthur's death. They then discover the young prince dead from a fall in an escape attempt and join the French cause.

Once Pandulph gets John to submit his crown to papal authority, he calls off the invasion, but the Dauphin rejects such manipulation. The wreck of his supply fleet prevents his victory, after the rebel lords return their allegiance to England before King John dies, poisoned by a monk.

**Words and Images:** *King John* uses the words *blood* and *right* more often than any other play in the canon; how those words and concepts relate in the play is worth considering, as is the play's privileging of *hand* (second most in the canon) and *eye* (third most).

Caroline Spurgeon finds that *King John*’s imagery focuses on the body and bodily action, especially by means of vivid personification. Abstractions such as war, death, grief, fortune, and commodity are described as persons. She notes that England, France, the city of Angiers, and Fortune are all described as women, whereas John himself is described in terms of body parts (a hand, a foot).

Wolfgang Clemen also notes images that presage impending doom.

**Elements to Watch in the Play:**
- choices (their basis and intent)
- the working of self-interest
- manipulation and duplicity vs. lack of control
- honor and how it is viewed
- patriotism and political rhetoric
History: The Reign of the Real

We can imagine why Shakespeare was drawn to the Wars of the Roses and the abdication/supplanting of Richard II as subjects for drama: they eventually gave England the Tudor dynasty under which his contemporaries still lived. But why go back to the 13th century for a play about King John? Because his reign shares with those 15th-century subjects a concern with legitimacy of rule and the many ambitions that seek, support, or undermine a monarchy.

13th-Century History

The Norman French conquered England in 1066, bringing new political and cultural traditions. While the French used primogeniture in determining monarchs, the Anglo-Saxon/English tradition of electing the most able member of the royal family to be king still held considerable sway in England. John's selection to be king proves the point. On the way to the Third Crusade in 1190, Richard the Lion-Hearted had named Arthur as his heir, and the French territories continued to back Arthur after Richard's death, but on his deathbed in France in 1199, Richard apparently named John heir.

Legitimacy: 1199-1204

The powerful lords at court had a choice—Richard's 12-year-old nephew Arthur, heir by primogeniture, who, as lord of Brittany, knew nothing of England, or the king's 32-year-old younger brother John, who had once rebelled against his brother but had experience.

The voices backing John proved decisive, and John initially made peace with Arthur. The contention arose anew in 1202, fed by repercussions from John's marriage arrangements in Aquitaine and also driven by King Philip's master plan to seize the Angevin territories for France. When Arthur was captured in battle at Mirebeau, his demise was probably inevitable, given John's need for secure rule.

Sovereignty: 1205-1214

John needed to regain the territory he had lost in France by 1204 and dedicated much of the next decade to that task, but he also became embroiled in an ecclesiastical matter that led to unforeseen consequences. The election of an Archbishop of Canterbury, a matter that should have been straightforward, tangled at every level until the two proudest and most powerful men involved, the king and the Pope, became intransigent, each wanting his own man in the post.

Timeline of the Historical King John

- 1167: John born
- 1189: John's father, King Henry II dies; John's only surviving brother, Richard, becomes king
- 1199: Richard I dies in early April. Seven weeks later John is crowned king.
- 1200: Treaty with King Philip II of France acknowledging John as king of England
- 1202: King Philip says John has forfeited French fiefdoms, which he grants as fiefs to Arthur. John defeats and captures Arthur in battle. Wars with France are ongoing for the next decade
- 1203: Arthur executed in France
- 1204: Initial election of Archbishop of Canterbury, which becomes contested between monks, bishops, King John, and the Pope
- 1208: Pope's interdict on England
- 1209: John excommunicated.
- 1213: John swears fealty to Pope and is absolved
- 1214: Pope's interdict lifted. Five-year truce with Philip II.
- 1215: Civil war between barons and John over exorbitant taxes. John makes peace, but a papal bull annuls the signed charter; civil war resumes. John actively engages in the war; the barons invite the Dauphin to invade England
- 1216: in May; the Dauphin lands, attacks, and declares himself king. While fighting John gets dysentery and dies at Newark in October. His 9-year-old son Henry is crowned king and rules for 56 years.

It became an issue of sovereignty—whether the king's word ruled or God's word through the Pope—which was a political issue across medieval Europe. John seized church property; the Pope used the leverage of interdict (banning church rituals except baptism and deathbed confessions) and then excommunication and a threat of deposition (King Philip got a French army and navy ready to invade and seize England) before the king gave in and then offered more than was asked in return, his crown as subject to the Pope.

Civil War: 1215-1216

Until the threat of deposition and invasion, the barons had weathered John's difficulty with the Pope, but they were outraged by the continual costs of war, which had been unrelenting since the reign of Henry II. John's losses in France proved doubly costly, for about 40 barons finally rebelled. A compromise was scuttled by the Pope, and open civil war erupted. John fought from border to border of England, but died of dysentery before it could be won. The barons who crowned his son Henry worked to resolve those lingering issues.
Henry II's Realm

Location, location, location—the map is an instant guide to the nature of the international conflict in *King John*. Philip II may be king of France, but for many years he controlled very little of the land mass of which he was king. Much of his turf was enfeoffed to the English royal family, which they had gained control of by marriage or inheritance.

John's father, Henry II, inherited England and Normandy from his mother, the Empress Matilda, granddaughter of William the Conqueror, the Duke of Normandy. From his father, Geoffrey of Anjou, he got the fiefs of Anjou, Maine, and Touraine, and later Brittany when his younger brother died. He then gained border fiefdoms to enhance his holdings.

Henry II also understood the power of a good political marriage, for when Eleanor of Aquitaine's marriage to King Louis VII of France was annulled by the Pope, 19-year-old Henry married 30-year-old Eleanor and got control of southwest France. John was the youngest of their eight children.

To call Henry II's family dysfunctional would be an understatement; in fact, they were called "the Devil's brood" for their tempers and infighting. He imprisoned his wife Eleanor for 11 years, saying she conspired against him with his sons, while brother regularly schemed against brother and son against father. (The famous play and film *The Lion in Winter* treats Henry II's family.) Because the bulk of the land was to be inherited by his older brothers to solidify their positions, so little was left for John that his own father nicknamed him John Lackland and intended him for a career in the church. John set out to make that nickname a lie, though the history of his reign proved it all too true.

First, his oldest surviving brother, Henry, who had rebelled against his father, died in 1183, making Richard the new heir to England and Normandy. John now finally gained paternal favor. In 1186 his older brother Geoffrey was killed in a tournament, leaving two brothers. When Richard I took the throne and immediately joined the Third Crusade, John began maneuvering to be his heir, although Richard did not trust him to govern England in his absence. Notwithstanding, John set up a court and headed toward civil war, making a deal with King Philip of France for his succession while his brother awaited ransom in captivity. But Richard later forgave John this disloyalty, and they fought together in France.

Meanwhile King Philip II of France used his overlordship slowly, patiently, and relentlessly to gain back bits of territory by treaty or conquest to create the nation of France, chiseling some away from Henry II, more from Richard I, and much more from John, for by 1204, John has lost most of the English holdings in northern France and compromised his holdings in Aquitaine. His son Henry inherited a far smaller kingdom, but one that was more recognizably English.
**History: King John's Issues in the Renaissance**

**The Renaissance Perspective: Legitimacy**

To a Renaissance audience, accustomed to primogeniture in inheritance, King John's extended confrontation with forces backing the primogeniture claims of Prince Arthur would have a very familiar ring. Their own monarch, Queen Elizabeth, had faced claims of illegitimacy of birth and rule her entire life.

The need for Elizabeth's birth to be legitimate prompted the Protestant Reformation in England after the Pope refused to annul Henry VIII's marriage to Catherine of Aragon so he could marry Anne Boleyn. Anne's pregnancy pushed the years-long situation to a crisis, so Henry declared himself head of the English church, now Anglican, and divorced Catherine. Elizabeth was placed in line for the throne by Parliament's Act of Succession, which was later revised when her half-brother Edward was born.

When Catherine's daughter Mary I, a Catholic, succeeded her Protestant half-brother on the throne after Edward VI's death in 1553, Catholics—who had always considered Elizabeth to be illegitimate—called for Elizabeth's death and began a series of purges of Protestant leaders, most of them at the stake. Though put under protective house arrest, Protestant Elizabeth lived to take the throne in 1558, but when she did not marry and produce an heir, she faced decades of assassination attempts from Catholic plots, fed by new primogeniture hopes.

**The Tudors**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Henry VII</th>
<th>Mary I</th>
<th>Edward VI</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arthur = Catherine of Aragon = Henry VIII</td>
<td>Margaret</td>
<td>James V of Scotland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane Seymour = Elizabeth</td>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>Queen of Scots</td>
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**The Early Plantagenets**

- Henry II = Eleanor of Aquitaine
- Richard I = Geoffrey = Constance = John = Eleanor (the Lion-Hearted) = Arthur = Henry III = Blanche

**The Dilemma of the Captive Rival**

If Elizabeth, the last surviving child of Henry VIII, were illegitimate, as the Catholics believed, and if she had produced no child, who was the legitimate heir to the English throne? By primogeniture, it was her cousin, Mary Queen of Scots, who had converted to Catholicism when she married the French Dauphin.

Just before King John was written, in fact, that major threat to Elizabeth's reign was resolved with the 1587 beheading of the Scots queen, who had fled to England and long been imprisoned there. Despite assassination attempts aimed at putting Mary on the English throne, Elizabeth had for years refused to sign Mary's death warrant, insisted she never intended the signed warrant to be used, and repudiated her secretary for using it as John does Hubert. After that, her presumed but unnamed heir was Mary's Protestant son, James VI of Scotland. Would England's future be peaceful or spark more civil wars in a bid for power?

Thus the issues in King John touch several flashpoints in late Tudor England—

- the legitimacy of rulers;
- a monarch's murder of a legitimate ruler or heir;
- religious authority in politics, especially Catholic power in now-Protestant England;
- and the endless rivalry with France.

Since the state censor would not approve plays treating contemporary politics, placing the action in the past allowed discussion of timely topics by well-chosen analogy. No wonder Shakespeare writes nine plays about earlier English history between 1590 and 1599, the time when the anxiety about England's future after Elizabeth was at its peak.
The historical reign of King John falls into three sections based on the developing crises:

- 1199-1204, solidifying the crown but losing northern French territory;
- 1204-15, arguing with the Pope
- 1214-16, the nobles' rebellion, culminating in a French invasion

The play King John includes all these elements, but Shakespeare characteristically compresses both the action and the time frame, so that all the events overlap. The excommunication and the idea for the French invasion both precede Arthur's capture and death, which itself sparks the nobles' rebellion, even though those events are separated by a decade and not causally connected in history.

Moreover, Shakespeare makes the issue of Arthur the linchpin of the play. Here Arthur's rival claim to the crown (or King Philip's use of that claim) sparks the war with France, and capturing Arthur spurs the decision to murder him, which in turn sparks the nobles' rebellion. The midpoint of the play in terms of lines is 3.3, in which John whispers the word "Death" for Arthur to Hubert. The emotional crux of the play is 4.1, the proposed blinding of Arthur, in which Hubert makes a merciful choice that sets up alternate disasters.

The Arcs of Action

- From 1.1 through 3.3 John is at war with France (despite the brief marriage interlude) and after the first scene is actually in France. The large scenes contain many smaller points of conflict. John ends up winning the battle and in control of his rival, then making the key decision to have him killed.

  • In 3.1 a second arc of action begins with Pandulph's excommunication of John. The Pandulph arc ranges from 3.1 through 5.2, when the Dauphin refuses to abort the invasion.

  This papal arc adds another layer to the play's political manipulation and levels of authority—now including church and God.

  • With 4.1, the scene of the proposed blinding, a twist of mercy syncopates both the ending of the Arthur plotline, moving it to 4.3 with Arthur's death, and the start of the nobles' reaction and rebellion in 4.2. There is an inevitability to Arthur's death in the play; Pandulph foresees it as a political necessity in 3.4; the lords know of the secret plan in 4.2 and assume the worst; and Arthur distrusts Hubert's mercy and falls to his death, losing the life that had just been spared and inadvertently fulfilling the lords' worst fears. The political machinations spin out of any one "player's" control as individuals leap to false conclusions and to their death.

  • The Dauphin's invasion of England unhistorically overlaps the nobles' defection from John, a plot arc that drives through the end of the play in 5.7 with the returned lords, a French peace offer, and the flag-waving speech of Faulconbridge.

  • How many other ways might the focal point and shape of the action be described?

Subplot Commentator

Shakespeare's history plays proceed with dispatch—fast and furious action, whether battlefield conflict or backroom plotting. He also includes comic or satiric subplots, such as the sarcasm of the Jack Cade scenes in Henry VI, Part Two or Falstaff and the tavern gang in the Henry IV plays. Such subplots always parallel and comment on the action of the main plot.

In King John, the subplot of the Faulconbridge inheritance issue in 1.1 yields the play's major commentator, a character known as the Philip the Bastard or often just the Bastard. (In the Middle Ages, bastardy was often mentioned without slur. Though there is an occasional mention of such a bastard of Richard's in the chronicles—which are largely fiction themselves—Philip Faulconbridge is Shakespeare's creation.)

The Bastard begins the play as a regular guy from the boonies, just interested in his chance of inheriting the estate. Yet he quickly catches the court "disease" of commodity/self-interest, and before 1.1 is over he has renounced his patrimony and welcomed the landless title of knight and royal bastard.

His introduction to foreign policy and negotiation in France amazes and amuses his wry, practical nature. He immediately recognizes that everyone is out for himself and considers doing the same. Yet as the play progresses, the Bastard is the least self-interested character; he is forthright, brave, loyal, and patriotic. His perspective gives us a unique window on the action and alerts us to its values.
How Do We Know John?
Disney! (Robin Hood/1973)

How close to Shakespeare’s King John is Disney’s version? Why is he depicted as a lion? (One blogger compares Sir Hiss in the film to Queen Eleanor in the play.)

Working with the Play and History
Pre-Show:
- Discuss how we respond to historical subjects and settings in film or on television as well as on stage. If the action occurred long ago and far away, is that important? Do we just say “they wore funny clothes and needed cars and the internet”? How important is it for us to take the imaginative journey into another time and its world view and values? Can we learn anything from “walking a mile in their moccasins”? Are their issues at all similar to our issues? Why do we tell old stories?

- What do we already know about King John before we see the play? Two “historical facts” may come to mind: he signed the Magna Carta in 1215, and he was king when Robin Hood lived in Sherwood Forest (as students probably learn from Disney, thus more fairy tale than fact; see left).

Interestingly, neither “fact” is quite what we think it is. The original Magna Carta of 1215 was not a revolutionary document but an insignificant and promptly ignored agreement, a document that hoped to resolve an ages-old dispute between the nobles and the king about taxes and the price of wars. (Asking who actually pays for war is a good question in any era.) Only with the political tensions and subsequent English civil war between Charles I and Parliament in the mid-17th century did Parliamentary forces dig up the Magna Carta and use it as a political precedent for their demands. They made it an important document for their purposes; to that point in history it had no such clout.

Moreover, the document they cited as the Magna Carta (the “big charter,” so called because there was also a “small charter”) was a later revision signed by John’s son King Henry III. So what we call fact may not reveal the actual facts.

- And Robin Hood? Some historians think if he did exist, he lived under Henry III, not John. John got a bad rap from some medieval chroniclers, so potent legend may not be fact.

Post-Show:
- The history treated by the play covers 16 years. What does the elapsed time of the action in the play feel like in performance—16 years? 16 months? 16 weeks? How fast do events seem to occur in the play, and how does one event seem to affect another? How does that affect our view of John and the events, considering how separate they were in history?

- Many people know Shakespeare’s version of historical events (or Disney’s…) better than actual history. Why might the difference between fact and art be something to consider? Is it OK to mess with history even if the audience may end up taking the play or film as “real” and not ever learn the actual history? Should we let ourselves “know” only fiction without fact? Are facts important, or just stories? (And in the Middle Ages there was a sliding scale of fact and fiction when recording “history,” which chroniclers shaped to tell a moral story. Chroniclers were also often paid to make their employers look good; they could be masters of spin, not objective observers. What is history now—absolute fact or argumentation/opinion? Do we expect our news reports to be fact or spin? Why?)

- Given the tighter time frame and other choices and changes Shakespeare makes with the causality and nature of persons and events in the play, what view does Shakespeare have of John and his reign? Does he seem to pick sides between John and Arthur, church and state, king and nobles, political right and political wrong? Does Shakespeare take sides or show us the sides? Does he tell us what to think or encourage us to think? Point to examples from the play to back up your view.

- Why is the appointment of an Archbishop of Canterbury so important? Research the experience of John’s father, Henry II, with his Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas a Becket, as context.
How Shakespeare Stages History: Chronology in 4.2

E. A. J. Honigmann notes that "John has been called Shakespeare's most unhistorical play. Act IV, Sc. ii alone fakes the sequence of events more cleverly than perhaps any other part of the canon. John's new coronation (l. 1) and the rumoured death of Arthur (l. 85) took place in 1202; the landing of the French (l. 110) in 1216; the death of Eleanor (l. 120) in 1220; the death of Constance (l. 122) in 1221; the Peter of Pomfret episode (l. 131) belonging to the year 1213; the five moons (l. 182) to 1200; practically the whole span of John's reign being crammed into one scene and made to seem simultaneous, for the dramatic advantage of heaping up John's troubles and omens of misfortune."

Staging History and Assessing Performance: King John

• Performance Study

How does the performance of a character or a line affect its import? Explore how many ways there are to deliver one of the play's key moments between John and Hubert (3.3.53-66) in terms of speed/timing/pause, word or tonal emphasis, clear intention or deceit. Are both men equally measured; are they willing or reluctant to engage? Analyze the tactics of persuasion.

John: ... I would into thy bosom pour my thoughts. But, ah, I will not! Yet I love thee well. And, by my troth, I think thou lovest me well. Hubert: So well that what you bid me undertake, Though that my death were adjunct to my act, By heaven, I would do it. John: Do not I know thou wouldst? 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 this foot of mine doth tread He lies before me. Dost thou understand me? Thou art his keeper. Hubert: And I'll keep him so That he shall not offend Your Majesty. John: Death. Hubert: My lord? John: A grave. Hubert: He shall not live. John: Enough.

Note: There are four shared lines in this exchange. In general in Shakespeare's performance, a shared line is meant to have unbroken delivery and rhythm.

The rule of thumb is that if there is a pause must fill the meter—either fitting the ongoing iambic pentameter or letting 10 syllables' space elapse so the silence hangs a bit. Modern actors love silences and pauses, thinking it makes the moment more dramatic or showy, but in Shakespeare's verse such pauses can let the air out of the idea and must be chosen seldom and carefully. Experiment to see what this passage offers in terms of such delivery.

Likewise, repetition is usually a signal for variety of intention in Shakespeare. In line 59, King John says Hubert's name three times. How and why might he be using the name each time and how does the use of Hubert's name fit into John's larger strategy in this passage?

Does John actually order Hubert to kill Arthur in this passage, or does he have deniability? Why might he frame the moment this way?

• Performance Activity for Three Groups

The action of the play opens with three large scenes full of formal state action and a few sidebar personal conversations:

• in 1.1, we see the reception of an ambassador and a declaration of war, plus a judicial proceeding
• in 2.1, we see a confrontation between heads of state and their armies, with others interrupting, plus a diplomatic appeal to a city, a battle reported, and a treaty proposal and negotiation
• in 3.1, we see a betrayed royal family member confronting the newly allied kings, followed by a church legate confronting the kings and making a demand which each must answer on the spot.

Assign each group one of these scenes as a focus. If they can read the scene prior to attending the performance, the play text is available online @ http://shakespeare.mit.edu/john/full.html

If not, they should understand to watch for and assess the basic elements listed above and consider the following:

How formal are the scenes? How does the discussion proceed in each case? How does a king conduct royal business? Are the kings tolerant, engaged, listening or more often demanding to be heard? Do the royals shift from formal politeness to formal terseness? From politeness to personal invective? If so, where and why? What is the overall tone and rhythm of each scene and where and why does it alter or break into something else? What is the effect of the choices made in production? How do we view these negotiations? Is one side more in charge, more slick, more ruthless? What does each side want and how do the production choices let us know what this is?

Notice as much detail as possible while you watch and take notes at intermission. Details are important to analysis and persuasion; record them. You can also check the text after seeing the production. Compile a descriptive evaluation of each scene and present it to the rest of the class; then consider what the three pieces comprise when seen as a unit (they make up more than 40% of the play). What story are they telling about King John?
The core of character, one’s identity, ethics, and morality, appears in one’s choices. How characters weigh motives and values gives insight into the minds and souls of Shakespeare's characters in King John, a play filled with confrontations and choices. Moreover, since it is a political play, the choices are challenging, balancing power against principle. The Bastard tells us that self-interest (commodity) is the driving ethic in the play—do the characters’ choices exhibit the truth of that claim?

**The Basic Issues and Cruxes**

- the right to the English crown—who is the legitimate ruler?
- the value of a sworn oath, a holy oath—can it be broken?
- when and why to declare war or invade and when and why to end it
- whether a crowned monarch has independent authority under God or should defer his crown to the Pope
- how to choose between divided loyalties
- a monarch's due to a captive kinsman/rival
- the role of political power and "commodity" in decisions of right/wrong/self-interest

**The Royals: King John**

- John's first choice is whether to defend his crown with war or to concede Arthur's claim of primogeniture made by the French king. Not surprisingly, as he sits on "his" throne, John says he will fight, even though his mother Eleanor confides his claim lies more in strength than "right."
- John moves swiftly into battle in France, and even agrees to cannonade the very town he claims to rule and defend, yet then he must choose whether to accept the marriage proposal of Blanche with the French Dauphin, which will cost him territory and money but gain peace and let him rule by undercutting the French king's backing of Arthur's claim. A quick chat with his mother convinces John to sweeten the offer and make peace as the more secure route to solidify his rule.
- No sooner is the marriage celebrated but Pandulph, the Pope's emissary, appears demanding John's acceptance of the Pope's choice for England's Archbishop of Canterbury. John asserts his own right to choose and finds himself excommunicated. As he continues to defy the papal authority, he causes a rift with his new French allies.

- In the renewed war, John's troops capture Arthur, the major threat to John's crown. He is royal, kin, and young, and now he is in John's hands. John immediately decides to kill him, a decision he regrets only when his lords abandon him because of it—that is, not for moral but for political reasons. So is eliminating Arthur or his lords' support more important? How do we assess John's repentant, revised decision?
- John must decide how to defend his country and crown against defection and invasion. Disheartened, he delegates military authority to the Bastard. His treasure is lost in the tide, as are many of the Bastard's troops, and he becomes the poisoning victim of another's plot, himself unwittingly vulnerable at the abbey.

**Questions for Prompts or Discussion**

- Is possession nine-tenths of the law? If John has the crown, does that mean he should keep it at all costs? Does morality have a chance against power considerations? What does this suggest about how powerful people make decisions? Do you think it is true in our political and economic world? Does/should possession or profit trump right? Why or why not?
- Assess John's and King Philip's decisions to back the marriage proposal. Granted that royal marriages were usually matters of foreign policy in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, evaluate the gain/loss equation for John in this deal. Does he gain more than King Philip? Is what John gains more important to him than its cost?
- What is the basis of John's refusal to accept the Pope's appointed Archbishop? John says, "What earthy name to interrogatories / Can task the free breath of a sacred king?" (3.1.147-8). How does he here define the basis of the Pope's power and how his own? What is "sacred" and why? How do politics and religion mix in the play, how did they mix in the English Renaissance, and how do they mix in contemporary politics?
- Should John have Arthur killed? Can Arthur be considered a traitor, or is this more of a mob hit or an immoral act that cannot be masked?
- If John second-guesses his actions, which ones are they? Why does he change his mind about them? For the "right" reasons?
Choices in King John/

The Royals: King Philip and the Dauphin

- The French back Arthur’s claim to the throne of England; why? What’s in it for them? Or are they solely interested in justice and the right? Why are the French so interested in the English doings? (look at the map)
- They agree to accept the marriage proposal as in their best interest. What is their larger objective here? Does this marriage further Arthur’s claim or enhance French holdings?
- King Philip finds himself stymied by his oath of peace when confronted by Pandulph’s demand for pious submission, which puts Philip back at war with excommunicated John. What are Philip’s issues and why does he decide as he does? Does the church trump politics for a ruler? Can one make a sacred oath and then break it moments later? (How? Ask Pandulph. He’s got the answer to everything except for the Dauphin at the end, a fitting turnabout.)

The Royal Mothers: Eleanor and Constance

- The royal mothers link this play with Shakespeare’s first tetralogy of history plays (the Wars of the Roses plays) in which Queen Margaret and Queen Elizabeth (Edward IV’s wife) are strong, articulate, powerful, grief-stricken women.

- In King John, Queen Eleanor is the power behind the throne, the voice in her son’s ear, one who knows the truth but works for gain. She steps into negotiation but is at her peak in attacking Constance in a delicious political catfight. Once she and John capture Arthur, however, she stays in France and disappears from the action. What is her value for the action of the play’s first half? What is her relationship with John? What is he without her?
- Constance is the driving force in the “Arthur for King” movement. How realistic are her chances of success? Does she know that? What does it mean that she has had to ally herself with the King of France to gain leverage? Is his involvement an asset or a liability to her cause? Does she know his real intentions?
- Constance shifts from power plays to grief at betrayal and the loss of her son. Do we see various aspects of Constance? Does she go mad? Do we define her character as more political or more maternal? Is she a contrast to Eleanor or like her?

The Commentator: Philip the Bastard

- Philip Faulconbridge enters 1.1 to defend his right to his Faulconbridge inheritance; he abandons that goal and chooses to be a knight known to be illegitimate and royal. Why does he make this choice? Is it the smart choice?
- As he steps into the new world of war, foreign policy, and manipulation, he taunts Austria (who wears his father’s lionskin) and makes the absurd suggestion that they stop bickering and obliterate the town that denies them all royal entry, a proposal they briefly adopt. Is the Bastard out of touch with what is going on or is he channeling it? Do he and the Citizen of Angiers show that smarts and quick thinking are equal opportunity traits?
- Having such a pungent presence in the first two acts, Philip the Bastard all but disappears in the third act, as Constance rants and grievances and Pandulph schemes and excommunicates. The Bastard succeeds in killing Austria to revenge his father’s death and is sent home to raise money, the crucial offstage action in a war and the one that actually triggered the nobles’ unrest in England. Except for 3.2, he is offstage from the end of 2.1 until the middle of 4.2, while Pandulph and Hubert take the stage. How does the purpose of the Bastard’s role compare to theirs? What is his role from 4.2 through the play’s end?
- Why is the Bastard so loyal to John? to England? what are his values?

In heraldry, the baton sinister (here in blue) on a coat of arms indicated illegitimacy. This coat of arms is that of Reginald, illegitimate son of King Henry I (the better known bend sinister did not always so indicate). "Sinister", meaning left, indicates direction.
The Royals: Arthur

• Historically, Arthur is 15 during the early action of the play, young adult by medieval standards, and is portrayed as a young warrior in Holinshed's Chronicles, but theatres tend to double his role with Prince Henry, who was 9 when he became king, and cast the role younger for pathos in the blinding scene.

What is the difference between a 9-year-old Arthur and a 15-year-old Arthur in how we see his fitness to be king? In what he says about himself? (Is he wise not to be rapacious to get the crown, or is he too soft to rule?) In how he argues to preserve his eyes? Is a boy earnest and a teen perhaps putting rhetorical spin on his plea, using anything he can to keep his sight? Why does someone who pleads so forthrightly then jump off a wall? Does he distrust Hubert or John? Is his escape attempt a prudent gamble? How old should Arthur be?

• E. A. J. Honigmann in the Arden 2 edition of the play suggests that this scene focuses on the concepts and values given to hand and eye in the play, with eye suggesting right and hand suggesting might.

How important to the play is the idea that the hand wants to put out the eye, that might blinds right? What are the implications?

Illustrating the Play

In the 18th and 19th centuries, illustrating Shakespeare was an industry, and many paintings were inspired by theatrical productions. Assess the three pictures below, each of Arthur begging Hubert not to maim him (4.1).

How does each piece work in terms of storytelling? Do they say exactly the same thing? What exact moment in the scene does each illustrate? How is the scene "staged"? Which details vary and what do they imply? What is the effect on the viewer/audience?

Illustrations of 4.1

Above: Hubert and Prince Arthur by William Karlbach, below left: by Christian Schissele (1858); below right: by Laslett John Pott (1873-76)
John declaring war to Chatillon

Text Notes: The tooth image used in the passage above right and the Bastard's earlier mention of the toothpick are not accidental—elaborate, decorative toothpicks were the latest fashion in 1590, associated with foreign travel. Shakespeare often uses cutting edge imagery his audience would immediately recognize, as our television does today.

impeach=accuse, assert


Working with Language in KING JOHN

1) Philip Faulconbridge, 1.1.182-183:
A foot of honor better than I was,
But many a many foot of land the worse!

Does the Bastard's arc parallel or contrast King John's (who also loses real estate in the play; does he gain honor)? Philip seems to embrace self-interest, then focuses on protecting England. Does John have a similar shift?

Philip's assessment of courtly interchange (1.1.212-16) is that it intends
to deliver
Sweet, sweet poison for the age's tooth.
Which, though I will not practice to deceive,
Yet, to avoid deceit, I mean to learn;
For it shall strew the footsteps of my rising.

How important is seeing words and deceit as both common and poison in this play? How crucial that Shakespeare plants the concept so early, plus the need to avoid being deceived.

2) Watch King Philip and King John's initial confrontation (2.1.106-19) and how the name of God is invoked—and for how long:

Philip: In the name of God
How comes it then that thou art called a king,
When living blood doth in these temples beat
Which owe the crown that thou o'ermasterest?

John: From who hast thou this great commission, France,
To draw my answer from thy articles?

Philip: From that supernal judge that stirs good thoughts
In any breast of strong authority
To look into the blots and stains of right.
That judge hath made me guardian to this boy,
Under whose warrant I impeach thy wrong
And by whose help I mean to chastise it.

John: Alack, thou dost usurp authority.

(Philiep: Excuse it is to beat usurping down.
(ad and then watch how the dialogue quickly descends into name-calling and vilification all around)

The kings' initial contact sets up a discussion of right, authority, and moral action that arcs through the play and is especially contrasted in the next scene when a church authority, Pandulph, the Pope's legate, appears and starts making demands in the name of God. It also links to the nobles' objection to the killing of Arthur, at which point they become rebels. Are such avowals of morality posturing or principled?

3) In 2.1. after the long initial wrangling, the kings decide to ask whom the town recognizes as king, each making a long speech about his right and threatening war if his right is not acknowledged:

Citizen: In brief, we are the King of England's subjects.
For him, and in his right, we hold this town.
John: Acknowledge then the King, and let me in.
Citizen: That can we not. But he that proves the King,
To him will we prove loyal. Till that time
Have we rammed up our gates against the world.
John: Doth not the crown of England prove the King?

Is the Citizen just being a wuss or is he wise, and if he's wise, in what way? He is given the power to decide—with dangerous consequences. Does he say "I'm not getting into that snake pit," does he say, "Not my pay scale to decide" or "That's your job, you guys with the armies. Our job as subjects is to serve the king"? What is his response?

In Henry VI, Part Three, two gamekeepers arrest the exiled king, Henry VI, who asks about their oaths of loyalty to him and if they are not thus breaking them. They respond, "No, for we were subjects but while you were king." Is this an example of moral relativism in both plays? Is there a basis for moral certainty in such matters?

4) The Bastard, responding to the kings' impasse with the Citizen, suggests both armies obliterate the town and then deal with each other, and asks (2.1.395-96):

How like you this wild counsel, mighty states?
Smacks it not something of the policy?

Policy is a loaded word in Shakespeare; in the Renaissance it means "the art of politics," but it implies maneuvering, deception, chess-match strategy, and duplicity. Is the Bastard outing their false rhetoric here or is he frankly joining this game of thrones? How "wild" are other decisions in the play? Is "wild" bad or creative?
5) In 3.1 when Constance learns the war for her son's right has turned into a marriage union between France and England, she at first disbelieves the king's sacred oath could be so broken, she feels betrayed, and she grieves for her son with "Nature and Fortune joined to make thee great.../ But Fortune, O, / She is corrupted, changed, and won from thee" (ll. 52-55). When the kings enter, she confronts them, saying (3.1.83-107) it is "A wicked day, and not a holy day!" and ends by prophetically invoking heaven to curse them with this day:
Arm, arm, you heavens, against these perjured kings!
A widow cries; be husband to me, heavens!
Let not the hours of this ungodly day Wear out the day in peace, but ere sunset
Set armed discord twixt these perjured kings!

Twenty-three lines later Pandulph enters, almost as if in answer to her plea.

6) Note that Shakespeare ends this plaintive section just before Pandulph's entry with the Bastard in ironic challenge to Austria, following Constance's lead as she lambasts that Duke, too (3.1.127-134):

Constance: Thou wear a lion's hide! Doff it for shame,
And hang a calfskin on those recreant limbs.
Austria: O, that a man should speak those words to me!
Bastard: And hang a calfskin on those recreant limbs.
Austria: Thou dar'st not say so, villain, for thy life.
Bastard: And hang a calfskin on those recreant limbs.
John: We like not this. Thou dost forget thyself.

Audiences delight in the Bastard's taunt, a challenge he will soon make good by avenging his father's death. Does the Bastard (or anyone else here) forget himself? What is the dramatic value of changing the tone this way right before Pandulph enters?

7) In 3.1.147-48, 153-61, King John throws the gauntlet back at the Pope with a clear assertion of his own right:

John: What earthy name to interrogatories Can task the free breath of a sacred king?... Add thus much more: that no Italian priest Shall tithe or toll in our dominions; But as we, under God, are supreme head, So, under Him, that great supremacy Where we do reign we will alone uphold Without th' assistance of a mortal hand. So tell the Pope, all reverence set apart To him and his usurped authority.

King Philip: Brother of England, you blaspheme in this.

Even though divine right of kings is a later concept, John here asserts or re-defines who is "sacred." "Italian priest" was a strong Protestant slur for the Pope in the Renaissance. Note, too, the use of "usurped," an ongoing theme in the play. John here uses the royal "we" and takes a strong stand which in 5.1 he reverses.

Church versus State has throughout history been a point of ecclesiastical and political contention—throughout medieval Europe, for the founding fathers in 1776-83, and across the world today, where religious intolerance can breed violence, schisms, or coups.

8) After three huge scenes filled with rhetoric and longish speeches, the fourth scene of the play, 3.2, is 10 lines long, contains three big points, and takes place in the middle of a battle. In it we may feel the shift in the dynamic between John and the Bastard—who does the work, who does the worrying:

Bastard: Now, by my life, this day grows wondrous hot.
Some airy devil hovers in the sky
And pours down mischief. Austria's head lie there,
While Philip breathes.

(Enter John, Arthur, Hubert.)

John: Hubert, keep this boy. Philip, make up!
My mother is assail'd in our tent, And ta'en, I fear.
Bastard: My lord, I rescued her; Her Highness is in safety, fear you not.
Our labor done, Arthur captured, Eleanor saved, plus a king cheered. Dramatic efficiency on the run?
9) The long scene between Hubert and Arthur, 4.1, deserves intense study for its rhetoric, the use of emotional appeal by Arthur, and Hubert's dilemma of split allegiances (which parallels Blanche's dilemma at the end of 3.1 when the war re-ignites on her wedding day). Only at the end (4.1.121-26) does Hubert make his decision, acknowledging yet another of the play's broken oaths:

**Hubert:** Well, see to live. I will not touch thine eye
For all the treasure that thine uncle owes.
Yet am I sworn, and I did purpose, boy,
With this same very iron to burn them out.

**Arthur:** O, now you look like Hubert! All this while
You were disguised.

Two elements compelled the deed: the promise of reward and the oath. Should we conclude, since Hubert mentions treasure first, that it was the greater motivation?

Arthur raises a different issue with his comment about moral identity. Do our foul urges or deeds disguise our true selves or are they part of our true selves? Was Hubert "disguised"? Is John a worthy king "disguised" by his fears and impulses to preserve his power? Is there a tension between private passion and public duty in the play? Are Arthur's words true or grateful but empty praise?

10) The scene following the near blinding is full of dramatic irony, since we know Arthur is alive but John and others are told he is dead. The lords, who have heard of Hubert's warrant to do the deed, test John by asking for Arthur's freedom, then reveal their awareness of his duplicity in their grief. They take a strong moral stand:

**Salisbury:** It is apparent foul play, and 'tis shame
That greatness should so grossly offer it.
So thrive it in your game! And so, farewell.

**Pembroke:** Stay yet, Lord Salisbury, I'll go with thee...

**John:** They burn in indignation. I repent.
There is no sure foundation set on blood,
No certain life achieved by others' death.

Quicker than Pandulp's arrival after Constance's prayer, Salisbury's wish for reprisal seems answered. In the next moment, a messenger reports France is about to invade and that John's mother and Constance have died. Then the Bastard brings in Peter the prophet who says John will relinquish his crown.

By killing Arthur John thought to solve all his problems; instead, he seems to have generated a host of new ones, though some of these are Pandulp-induced and not Arthur-related. John's problems multiply and his allies dwindle. He is left with the loyal Bastard and curses Hubert for entrapping him, for luring him into a foul and murderous impulse. Is that fair?

Is John's moment of repentance a true spiritual insight, or is the rest of the scene an object lesson to teach him its truth? Does John have moments of flashing rage that get him in trouble, which he must amend as he can?

11) The wall is high, and yet will I leap down.

Arthur makes a bold or foolhardy choice to escape; he would rather die trying. How many characters in this play, most especially Arthur and John in this sequence of scenes from 4.1 through 4.3, find themselves on perilous heights and seeking any available escape route, even a perilous one? How many times do characters "leap" in *King John*? And what is the result? Are others' leaps more successful than Arthur's?

"O me! My uncle's spirit is in these stones," dying Arthur sighs. Dramatic irony again—at this point does King John seek such a bloody end for his nephew? Does the Dauphin now begin to take over that bloody role? Whose spirits are in the stones others fall on as the play complicates further and concludes?

12) John's change of conscience about Arthur is juxtaposed to his change of conscience about the Church, for in 5.1 he submits his crown to the pope and realizes the validity of Peter's prophecy:

I did suppose it should be on constraint;
But, heav'n be thanked, it is but voluntary.

Is John correct? Does he relent to Pandulp righteously or out of fear for his reign amid the revolt? Compare his two changes of conscience to those in the rebellion: Melun's dying warning to the rebels about the Dauphin's plans and the lords' "chivalrous" return to England's cause.
Some Critical Views on *King John*

**Note:** These comments are not presented as truths to be learned but as assertions to be considered and evaluated. Critics do not always agree, nor need you. The purpose is to assess and support your view.

- John Masefield (1911): *John* "is an intellectual form in which a number of people with obsessions illustrate the idea of treachery."

- G. R. Hibbard (1981): "John is the first of Shakespeare's tragic criminals, the man of power who gives way to temptation that the successful exercise of power brings with it."

- R. Chapman and E. A. J. Honigmann believe *John* follows the medieval "wheel of Fortune" pattern for tragedy—that all in high places fall on Fortune's ever-turning, fickle wheel. Honigmann argues John thrives in the early part of the play, with impetuousness his tragic flaw. He also notes that Arthur is resurrected in Prince Henry at the end.

- J. Dover Wilson and others assert that Shakespeare may have revised the text to make Hubert be the Citizen at Angiers, and the Arden2 text prints the role as such. Others still separate the roles. [What is the effect of the Citizen being Hubert?]

- Many critics comment on the interweaving of levels of language in the text: the official, the unofficial, and the impassioned. The play has also been called a debate. [Watch for and explore these levels if you are reading any of the play aloud in class.]

- Many critics argue the play has no hero, a few that John is an unsatisfactory hero, and some more recently that the Bastard is the hero. Critics such as L. A. Beaurline in the New Cambridge edition (1990) argue, however, that the Bastard is a "social animal" and that his integrity has been exaggerated in the 20th century.

- E. A. J. Honigmann responds to critics of John as hero that, while John may not be introspective, he "explores and exploits his fellow-men. He tries to find everyone's price" by systematically buying off the Bastard, France, Hubert, Arthur, the nobles briefly, and lastly even the Pope in order to have the Dauphin bought off. He calls John a "virtuoso politician," whose tactics are brilliant, no matter how short-sighted his strategy. Honigmann adds, "If he is not the hero, he is certainly the villain."

- L. A. Beaurline notes that the Citizen's proposal of the royal marriage is "an eventuality that begins the vortex which will swallow King John and almost destroy the kingdom."

**Resources for *King John***

**Online Resources:**
- Mr. William Shakespeare and the Internet  http://shakespeare.palomar.edu/education.htm
  The master site for Shakespeare resources online; this specific URL links to sites and resources for teaching Shakespeare
  An introduction to Shakespeare’s language, with exercises using Shakespearean insults (a crowd pleaser)
- http://www.folger.edu
  Support for teaching Shakespeare (but, alas, no lesson plans for King John)
  and of course:
  - http://www.swshakespeare.org
    The site for what's happening at Southwest Shakespeare!

**Print Resources:**
- Peter Saccio, *Shakespeare's English Kings*, 2nd ed.
  A brilliant, straightforward triangulation between medieval sources, modern historians, and Shakespeare's history plays
- Michael Flachmann, *Shakespeare from Page to Stage*
- Issac Asimov, *Asimov's Guide to Shakespeare*
Additional Student Activities for King John

Heraldry
- Research medieval heraldry and design your own coat of arms based on your identity, associations, and interests. A coat of arms can describe who you are or what you stand for (compare Sir Gawain’s shield with its five-pointed star and its symbolism if you’ve read Sir Gawain and the Green Knight). (Visual Arts-S1:C4:PO401)

Become A Chronicler!
- Take the persona of someone chronicling the events in the play and write your blog or Facebook posts of the events and issues (are our blogs a form of medieval chronicling?). (9-10.W.5, 11-12.W.5)
OR take the persona of a major character in the play and write your blog or Facebook posts on the events and issues. (9-10.W.5, 11-12.W.5)

What would be the best hashtags for your persona character in each act of the play?
- Do a Jon Stewart segment based on King John. (Theatre-S1:C2:PO201)

Popular Entertainment Then and Now
- Compare King John to Game of Thrones, House of Cards, or any other popular politically-based film or television series. Are their issues our issues? Is their behavior our behavior? Is their politics our politics? (9-10.RI.7, 11-12.RI.7)

Medieval Illumination and You
- Study the techniques of the medieval illuminations shown on pages 1, 3, and 14, and compare the medieval technique to modern cartoons, action comic books, and graphic novels. Design your own medieval illumination or illumination collage for a moment in the play. (Visual Arts-S1:C4:PO402)

Which element should be central and why? Which one should break the boundary of the frame and why? Which colors are important? Is there a realistic background or a ground of color/pattern? (Visual Arts-S1:C4:PO302)

Design
- Design a poster for the show aimed at piquing the attention and interest of your fellow students.
- Design a poster for the show using only one graphic element—why choose that one? (Visual Arts-S1:C4:PO202)

It's a Sport
- Score the action as if it were a sport (you pick which sport and justify your choice). Who leads when? Penalties? Who wins? (9-10.RI.1, 11-12.RI.1)

The invasion of Louis, the Dauphin, in May 1216 from the Chronicle of Matthew Paris