

William  
shakespeare's play –  
henry v



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These two lines in the beginning of William Shakespeare's play signifies that this is a story that will include tremendous fields, grand battles, and battling kings. In the play, a character named Chorus who sets the scene apologizes in light of the fact that it is extremely unlikely for the play to precisely represent Henry V's war against France on a tiny little stage with just a bunch of actors. Chorus also advises the viewers that we have to use our imaginations in order to help bring the magnificent events to life, since it is impossible for the play to "hold the vastly fields of France" and the thousands of soldiers and horses that were involved in the historic Battle of Agincourt.

Before the Battle of Agincourt, Henry disguises himself as a common soldier to see what his men think about the battle and about him as a king. He even exchanged his gloves with the soldier so that if both of them survived the war, they will be able to recognize one another. In the Battle of Agincourt, the England soldiers were outnumbered five to one. However, Henry did not think of that as an excuse to cancel the war. He still continued his plan. The French soldiers were already celebrating their win, and the English soldiers started to build in fear. The reason that the English soldiers were outnumbered was because there was a sickness going around killing these men. However, at the end of this battle England won. This reveals that Henry's leadership skills and strategy helped his country to win the war. Henry was able to reveal his leadership skills through the war and demonstrated to the other country that he was fully capable and good enough to run a whole country on his own. Even though at first many people could not trust Henry because he used to live with thieves and drunkards at

a tavern in the "contaminated" side of London, therefore many question if Henry is apt to be a king and hold the responsibility in governing a kingdom. However, Henry managed to prove that he has changed from a playful person to a serious person the moment he became a king. Henry V can be called a good king and leader because he has portrayed good leadership and motivated his men to win the Battle of Agincourt, he also changed his deviant ways to honorable ones in which he became the definition of what a good leader is. Yet because Henry was a good king and leader it can be argued that he was not a good person because he totally cut ties and betrays his good friend Falstaff as soon as he became a king. He also executes Bardolph and Nym for looting instead of giving them a different condemnation.

Even then, the fact that Henry reached the limit of being in war in which he at one point threatens to kill children, women, and elders in Harfleur which demonstrates that he was not a honorable person. This can be proven from an excerpt from the text, "If they do not surrender, they will kill the children, the maidens and old folks". Hence, we could say that Henry is a good and responsible king but he is not a noble person. However, in becoming a great king, Henry is forced to act in a way that, were he a common man, might seem immoral and even impossible to be forgiven. Henry's friendship with Falstaff signifies that no matter how close you were in the past, laws are still laws in which a king should follow in order to gain respect and trust from his people. In order to strengthen the stability of his throne, Henry betrays his friends such as Falstaff, and he puts other friends to death in order to uphold the law. Henry talks of favoring peace, but once his mind is settled on a

course of action, he is willing to condone and even create massive and unprovoked violence in order to achieve his goal. Henry is a very determined person, and as a king, he totally ignores any obstacles that can stop him from achieving his goals. Even though England has not enough soldiers as compared to France, but Henry still continues the war. He is willing to do anything as long as his goals are achieved. He also has to set aside his personal friendship and do what was best to his kingdom even if it takes him to kill his own friends. Henry is also a religious person. Before the war starts, he prays to give thanks and gratitude to God. Furthermore, he believes that whatever the church says is a holy thing in which he must follow. So when the church gives an order or said something, Henry perceives it as a truth. Henry thinks that the church knows better and every order from the church is a sign that he must carry the plan in order to be a better king to his kingdom. That is why the moment his friend, Bardolph stole something from the church, Henry approves the punishment which is to hang Bardolph to death as it is a very serious mistake and an unforgivable sin to be committed in a holy church. No one should commit sins in the church. Henry V is in most respects a model of the ideal king who is wise, just, courageous, and kind. Yet there are a number of moments when less praiseworthy qualities seem apparent. It would be an overstatement to say he is a villain, but neither is he as perfect as his surface behavior would indicate. Although Henry V exhibits the virtues of an ideal king throughout the play, certain details suggest that some aspects of his nature are less than admirable, indeed, that there are elements of the villain, as well as the hero, in him. The positive qualities in him are to an extent counterbalanced by negative tendencies. One of the examples of Henry's positive behaviors can be seen through his

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treatment towards his soldiers. He shows mercy toward a drunken soldier who insulted him. Henry plans to free him, but Cambridge, Scrope, and Grey advise him to punish the man instead. Henry decides to free the man anyway, and he lets Cambridge, Scrope, and Grey know that he has discovered their intended betrayal which is working with the French. The three beg for mercy, but Henry being an inflexible king, he asks how can they possibly seek mercy for themselves when they think an ordinary drunkard deserves no mercy. He has proved that he is a down-to-earth king and is willing to forgive his people who commits mistakes in front of him and not betray him behind his back, and that any kind of betrayal has to be punished and given no mercy. On the other hand, one of the examples of Henry's negative behaviors is when he threatens to kill the refugees in Harfleur if they do not surrender, in order to conquest a city. As a King of England, he should not be doing that because he makes them feel as if it is not safe to live in their own country. Therefore, they have to surrender in order to survive and continue living in peace. As a conclusion, Henry V is a play where it shows how Henry transforms from an immature and playful man named Hal to a serious and responsible person the moment he became the King of England. We can see how great is his leadership skills which is portrayed through the victory in the Battle of Agincourt. He never lets any problems ruin his plan. We can also see Henry's greedy behavior in the beginning of the play where Henry received a marriage proposal from Catherine in France and he rejected it because they only offered him a part of France. Henry wanted all parts of France because he perceived that France is meant to be inherited to him as his great grandfather rules France

before. However, at the end of the play, he eventually married Catherine as soon as he met her face-to-face and mesmerized by her beauty.