

Henry V

by William Shakespeare

Henry V leads an English army to invade and conquer France. The outcome of this war will prove whether or not Henry has put aside his wild youth and become an effective leader and ruler, and whether he has the moral authority of a legitimate king—in other words, whether or not God is on his side.

The modern movie that best shows this text is *Henry V* directed by Kenneth Branagh. It is not an easy movie to understand if you don't know the whole story, but the speeches given by Branagh are excellent examples of motivational speeches. The DVD version is available, and you can select the following scenes for discussion.

Henry V has taken his army into France and this speech is given before the wall of the town of Harfleurs. Write a modern English summary beside the original text.

Act III scene i

Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more,	_____
Or close the wall up with our English dead.	_____
In peace there's nothing so becomes a man	_____
As modest stillness and humility;	_____
But when the blast of war blows in our ears,	_____
Then imitate the action of the tiger;	_____
Stiffen the sinews, summon up the blood,	_____
Disguise fair nature with hard-favour'd rage;	_____
Then lend the eye a terrible aspect;	_____
Let it pry through the portage of the head	_____
Like the brass cannon; let the brow o'erwhelm it	_____
As fearfully as does a galled rock	_____
O'erhang and jutty his confounded base,	_____

Questions:

1. Coaches talk about putting on your “game face” in sports. What does the “game face” that Henry talks about look like?
2. Once their face is set, what does Henry tell them that they have to back up this outward appearance of strength?
3. Why does he mention their fathers and their mothers at this stressful time just before battle?
4. The speech follows a definite pattern of progression of appeal. What are the three areas and why does Henry follow this path in his appeal to the soldiers?
5. The director and actor playing Henry V, Kenneth Branagh, said that he wanted to show “that the heroism on display is spiritual as well as physical.” How does this speech support that view of the story?

Act IV scene iii

The English army has been fighting their way across France and they are about to fight their most important battle of the campaign. King Henry V disguises himself on the eve of battle to wander among his troops and to understand their readiness and their morale. What he finds appalls him. His troops are unmotivated and resentful.

In the following famous speech, King Henry V is speaking to his troops just before the battle in which they are outnumbered at least five to one against rested troops, while the English have been trudging across French soil for months. The odds against them are very great. Write a modern English summary beside the original text.

Rather proclaim it, Westmoreland, through my host, _____
That he which hath no stomach to this fight, _____
Let him depart; his passport shall be made, _____
And crowns for convoy put into his purse; _____
We would not die in that man's company _____
That fears his fellowship to die with us. _____

This day is call'd the feast of Crispian.

He that outlives this day, and comes safe home,

Will stand a tip-toe when this day is nam'd,

And rouse him at the name of Crispian.

... he'll remember, with advantages,

What feats he did that day. Then shall our names,

Familiar in his mouth as household words -

Harry the King, Bedford and Exeter,

Warwick and Talbot, Salisbury and Gloucester -

Be in their flowing cups freshly rememb'ed.

This story shall the good man teach his son;

And Crispin Crispian shall ne'er go by,

From this day to the ending of the world,

But we in it shall be remembered -

We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;

For he to-day that sheds his blood with me

Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile,

This day shall gentle his condition;

And gentlemen in England now-a-bed

Shall think themselves accurs'd they were not here,

And hold their manhoods cheap whiles any speaks

That fought with us upon Saint Crispin's day.

Questions:

1. What is about to occur?

2. What does the King offer anyone who wishes to leave at this point?

3. What special day does this happen to be?
 4. What will happen on future days according to the King's prediction?
 5. What relationship will any man, who fights this battle, have with the King?
 6. What are the two reasons, that the King offers the men, to fight this battle?
 7. Quote a line that you feel is powerful. Explain your choice.
 8. State and explain three qualities of King Harry that show he is a good leader.
- A fun modern movie comparison is the motivational speech given in *Independence Day* by Bill Pullman acting as the president of the USA. His speech before they attempt to attack the overpowering alien force resonates many elements from Henry V's St. Crispin's Day speech.

In less than an hour, aircraft from here will join others from around the world, and you will be launching the largest aerial battle in the history of mankind. Mankind, that word should have new meaning for all of us today. We can't be consumed by our petty differences any more. We will be united in our common interest. Perhaps it's fate that today is the Fourth of July, and you will once again be fighting for our freedom. Not from tyranny, oppression or persecution, but from annihilation. We're fighting for our right to live, to exist, and should we win the day, the Fourth of July will no longer be known as an American holiday, but as the day when the world declared in one voice: 'We will not go quietly into the night! We will not vanish without a fight! We're going to live on! We're going to survive! Today we celebrate our Independence Day!'

Bill Pullman as President Thomas J. Whitmore

- Motivational speeches that are worth reading as a class are Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I have a dream" from the Civil Rights era and Winston Churchill's "We will never be defeated" speech from WW II.