

TSSMTM
Creating VCE Success

SAMPLE

ENGLISH TEXT SUMMARY NOTES
“Richard III”

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AREA 1:
READING AND RESPONDING

Chapter 1
AUTHOR NOTES

1.1 William Shakespeare

Tradition asserts that William Shakespeare was born on 23 April 1564, St George's Day. The eldest son of a prosperous glove-maker in Stratford-upon-Avon, he was probably educated at the town's grammar school. Tradition further holds that between 1585 and 1592, Shakespeare first became a schoolteacher and then set off for London. By 1594 he was a leading member of the Lord Chamberlain's Men, helping to direct their business affairs, as well as being a playwright and actor. In 1598 he became a part-owner of the company, which was the most distinguished of its age. However, he maintained his contacts with Stratford, and his family seem to have remained there. From about 1610 he seems to have grown increasingly involved in the town's affairs, suggesting a withdrawal from London. He died on 23 April 1616, in his 53rd year, and was buried at Holy Trinity Church on the 25th.

Chapter 2

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Richard III is based on the Wars of the Roses, the name given to the rivalry between the royal houses of Lancaster and York for the throne of England and the intermittent wars in which they fought for three decades (1455-1485) in the 15th century. The name is of a later origin and derives from the fact that the Tudors, who represent both houses, adopted as their emblem the red and white roses. The causes of the wars were not necessarily the hereditary claims to the crown professed by representatives of the two houses. Richard, Duke of York was only a distant descendant of Edward III (1327-1377), and his claim to be the heir of Henry VI could not be pressed after the king sired a son, Edward, in 1453. The true reasons, therefore, should be sought in the endemic feuds of the nobility, its frustration following a series of defeats in France, and the feeble leadership of Henry VI. The first battle at St. Albans (22nd May 1455) between the Duke of York and the royal army did not immediately lead to the victor's claim on the throne, but only to a temporary assumption by the Yorkists of the principal offices of government. Yet, in 1459, when the conflict was renewed, the parties had grown more intransigent and, in 1460, following his victory at Northampton, York asserted his claim, and the captured Henry VI had no choice but to acknowledge it.

The conflict is considered to have ended with the Battle of Bosworth (22nd August 1485) in which Richard III was killed, but the fighting had not continued uninterrupted. Under Edward IV, there were extended lulls; in fact, most of the major battles took place between 1459 to 1461, and 1469 to 1471. In a sense, the Yorkists had defeated the Lancastrians, and it was only the dissension in their own camp which ignited the latter phase of the wars. Moreover, the final Tudor-Lancastrian victory of Henry VII might not have been possible without Richard III's first damaging, by his own behaviour, the cause of York.

The economic and social development of England was not much affected by the wars. Indeed, at the same time there was an upsurge in commerce and a distinct rise in the status of the merchant class, which was felt in the lower House of Parliament. On the political side, however, the wars had yet another result: by destroying some of the old nobility, they paved the way for the rise of the strong Tudor government.