

# Study Guide on William Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Part I*

"I shall hereafter, my thrice-gracious lord, / be more myself" (3.2.93<sup>1</sup>). Who is Prince Hal, truly? How does his character appear to change throughout the play? Compare and contrast his state at the beginning of the play with that achieved by the end.

- Consider the first reference to the prince (1.1.78–90). What appears to be wrong in his life? What effect is this having on his father, the king, and the state?
- What is your reaction to the prince when he first appears in person (1.2)? What kind of tone does he seem to take with Falstaff, and what kind of general attitude toward life?
- What does Hal's intention to be a "rising sun" (1.2.188 ff.) reveal about his character? How long do you think this plan has been in his mind? Does it make sense? Is it wise?
- What changes do we see in Hal, and what are their causes?
  - What effect does the stern rebuke by his father have on Hal (3.2)?
  - Is Hal's promise to reform himself (3.2.129 ff.) earnest? Does his father believe him? Is Hal's reformation accomplished?
- Consider the qualities we see in Hal at the end of the play. Will he make a good ruler? Has he recently acquired these traits, or has he always possessed them in some way?
  - Consider his interaction with Hotspur before and after his death (esp. as described in 5.2.51–68 and seen in 5.4.91 ff.).
  - What kind of respect does he show Douglas (5.5.25 ff.)? Is this desirable in a leader?

How does the younger Henry Percy ("Hotspur") compare with Prince Hal? What does this comparison reveal about each of the two young men? What virtues, strengths, and weaknesses are present in each?

- Why does Henry IV say that he would rather have Hotspur as a son (1.1.78–90; 3.2.93–128)? What desirable qualities does he see present in Hotspur that are lacking in Hal?
- Do they both love honor? If so, is there a different quality to their love? How do they pursue it differently? (See, for example, 5.4.68–72; 5.4.76–79.) How does each one see his own honor as related to the other?
- Consider the humorous side of Hotspur:
  - What do the scenes with "Kate" (Lady Percy) reveal about Hotspur's character (2.3, 3.1)?

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<sup>1</sup> Shakespeare, William. *The First Part of King Henry IV*. Edited by Claire McEachern. New York: Penguin Group, 2000. (All act, scene and line numbers refer to this edition.)



- How does Hotspur reveal his character in his interactions with Glendower (3.1)?
- How do Hal and Hotspur compare with respect to time and patience? Why is Henry Percy called “Hotspur”? Is the reason for this manifest in the play?
- Is one more reasonable than the other?

What is the nature of honor? How do different characters’ visions of honor shine light on this question? Consider Falstaff’s “catechism” on honor (5.1.127–140), Hotspur’s intentions and actions, and Hal’s words and achievements.

Compare the nature of kingship found in this play with that found in *Richard II*. What, if anything, has changed since Richard’s reign?

- Who now are the “rebels,” and who are those loyal to the crown?
- How much legitimacy does the rebel cause have?
- What reasoning does Henry IV give against those insurrections?
  - “And never yet did insurrection want / Such water colors to impaint his cause” (5.1.79–80).
  - Is there any sense of “divine right” in Henry’s defense of his kingship?
- How does the current rebellion compare with Henry’s (then Bolingbroke’s) own rebellious actions in *Richard II*?

Why is Hotspur rebelling? Why does he have allies?

- Consider the cause of his anger in 1.3 (especially 227–229). What exactly enrages Hotspur? Is it something great or petty? To what extent has an objective wrong been done to him and/or his family, and to what extent is he exaggerating things?
- What justification does Hotspur give to Blunt for his actions (4.3.52 ff.)? See, for example: “And in conclusion drove us to seek out / This head of safety, and withal to pry / Into his title, the which we find / Too indirect for long continuance” (4.3.102–105).
- What major accusations does Worcester make in his defense of the rebellion (5.1.30)? How do these complaints compare with Hotspur’s?
- What is the archbishop’s motivation for supporting the rebels (4.4)?

Consider the role of Falstaff in the play.

- Who is Sir John Falstaff, and what does he represent? What kind of man is he?
  - What does Falstaff love? Does he love his “friends”?
  - Is there any virtue in Falstaff? (See 3.3.152 ff., 5.4.120 ff.)
- “Ah, no more of that, Hal, an thou lovest me!” (2.4.271) Does Hal love Falstaff?
  - How fully is Hal tied to Falstaff and the others, and their way of life?
  - Why would Hal want to spend so much time with them? Is it for pleasure, friendship, entertainment, education, or something else?



- Falstaff exclaims to Hal, “O, thou hast damnable iteration, and art indeed able to corrupt a saint” (1.2.90–91), and later laments, “Company, villainous company, hath been the spoil of me” (3.3.9–10).
  - Who has corrupted whom—Falstaff or Hal?
  - What seems to be Hal’s initial response to the robbery proposal (1.2.134–143)? How does Poins convince him to join in (1.2.155 ff.)?
- “Banish plump Jack, and banish all the world! / [Prince:] I do, I will” (2.4.464–5). Is Hal’s response here playful, or serious? Should he banish Falstaff, when he becomes king? Does it seem that he will, judging from this play?

**Suggested use:** This study guide includes a few questions and observations about William Shakespeare’s *Henry IV, Part I*. Among possible uses, one could consider these comments while reading the work; or one could use them as starting points for a classroom discussion.

