

Richard III

Director's Notes by Riley O'Toole

When Shakespeare wrote Richard III more than four hundred years ago, he could never have imagined TikTok, Instagram, or the rise of artificial intelligence. But the questions his play raises about power, truth, and manipulation feel eerily like they were written for our world today.

Richard begins the play by telling us exactly what he intends to do: lie, cheat, and kill his way to the throne. What's most disturbing is not only that he succeeds for so long—it's that almost everyone around him goes along with it. Why? Because he knows how to shape perception. Richard doesn't only fight battles with his sword; he fights them with words. He spins rumors, stages fake "proof," and manipulates the crowd into believing him. He creates the image of who he wants to be, and people follow it. Sound familiar?

We live in a time where the line between truth and fiction is blurring every day. Social media allows us to construct carefully curated identities—filters, captions, and staged photos that don't always reflect reality. Misinformation spreads faster than facts, often because it's more entertaining. Now, with artificial intelligence capable of creating realistic fake videos, images, and voices, it's harder than ever to tell what's authentic. Richard would have thrived in this world. He was the original "influencer villain," mastering the art of persuasion long before hashtags and algorithms existed.

For high school students, this play speaks directly to the environment



you navigate daily. How often do we believe something because it has been shared enough times, not because it's true? How do we decide what voices to trust when we are surrounded by competing narratives? And what happens when people use these tools—whether memes, fake accounts, or AI-generated content—to harm others or build power for themselves? The unsettling truth is that Richard succeeds not only because he is cunning, but because others allow him to succeed. He thrives in a world where silence, apathy, and the hunger for spectacle drown out the truth. What does it cost to speak up when everyone else remains silent?

Richard's physical identity, which he describes as "deformed" and "unfinished" also raises powerful questions about how society treats difference, and disability. Shakespeare gives us a character who has been defined by his body since birth, and whose bitterness as a result drives much of his ambition. How much of who we become is shaped by the way others see us, and treat us? And what happens when people are constantly forced into categories—by appearance, by status, or today, by the carefully managed images we post of ourselves?

At its heart, this play isn't just about one man's ambition. It's about a society that allows itself to be deceived because truth is uncomfortable and lies are easier. We live in a world where we must constantly evaluate: What's real? What's manipulated? How do we know who someone truly is behind the persona they present online?

Richard loses everything by the end—not because he is outsmarted by others, but because the illusions he created collapse under their own weight, and the reality of his actions comes back to haunt him:

"There is no creature loves me, and if I die, no soul shall pity me. Nay, wherefore should they, since that I myself find in myself no pity to myself?"

Truth still matters, but only if we care enough to fight for it. In a time when reality can be rewritten with the swipe of an app or the prompt of a machine, Shakespeare's warning feels urgent: if we stop questioning, if we stop seeking truth, then anyone—even a Richard—can rule the feed.

Shakespeare in the Schools 2025 Administrative Staff

Kevin Asselin	Executive Artistic Director
Riley O'Toole	Associate Artistic Director
Adam Fedock	Production Manager
Carrie Wintersteen	Managing Director
Liz Johnson	Director of Access & Engagement
Vicki Stenberg	Executive Associate

Shakespeare in the Schools 2025 Production Team

Riley O'Toole	Director
Mara Flynn	Stage Manager
Tom Watson	Scenic Designer
Angela Cateora	Costume Designer
Stacy Hostetter	Properties Designer
Nok Kanchanabanca	Sound Designer
Kevin Asselin	Fight Director
Katherine E. Norman	Education Director
Peter Fedock	Lighting Designer/Electrician
Dylan McPhail	Audio Engineer
Lydia Gray	Text and Verse Coach
Gretchen Minton	Dramaturg
Juliette Walsh	Costume Assistant
Nora Tjernagel	Stitcher
Ashley Milleson	Carpenter
Arnold Bueso	Multimedia Designer

The Story

Our play begins at the end of decades of civil war in England. The bloody Wars of the Roses between the rival Houses of Lancaster and York seem to have reached an end, and the victorious Yorkists look forward to a period of peace under the newly-crowned King Edward IV.

But Edward's younger brother, Richard, Duke of Gloucester, wants the crown for himself. Thus begins Richard's violent march towards the throne.

Richard manipulates King Edward into imprisoning their brother George, Duke of Clarence, in the Tower of London for treachery. Richard then arranges his murder in such a way that makes Edward think it is his own fault. Edward blames himself for Clarence's death and dies shortly after.

Meanwhile, Richard convinces the noblewoman Lady Anne to marry him, even though she knows that he murdered both her first husband and her father-in-law.

King Edward IV leaves behind him his wife – the now-widowed Queen Elizabeth – two young sons, and a daughter. His eldest son is still a child and not old enough to rule. Richard is, therefore, appointed Lord Protector of England, putting him in charge until the Prince grows up. Richard orders the execution of several powerful nobles to protect his power, including Queen Elizabeth's sister Rivers.

Richard tells the young Princes that they should stay in the Tower of London for their own safety. While the Princes are imprisoned in the Tower, Lord Buckingham – a nobleman who supports Richard – follows Richard's orders to spread rumors that the princes are not true heirs because they are illegitimate. Richard and Buckingham then stage events that manipulate the Mayor of London and the citizens to install Richard as King of England.

Following his coronation, Richard sends the executioner Tyrrel to murder the Princes. As the bodies start to pile up, the people of England become increasingly fearful of Richard. Buckingham asks Richard to make good on the titles and lands that he had promised to Buckingham in return for his support. Richard brushes him off. Buckingham turns against Richard, and he too is executed.

Meanwhile, the Lancastrian Henry Tudor, Earl of Richmond (called "Richmond" in the play) is raising forces in France to return to England and challenge Richard.

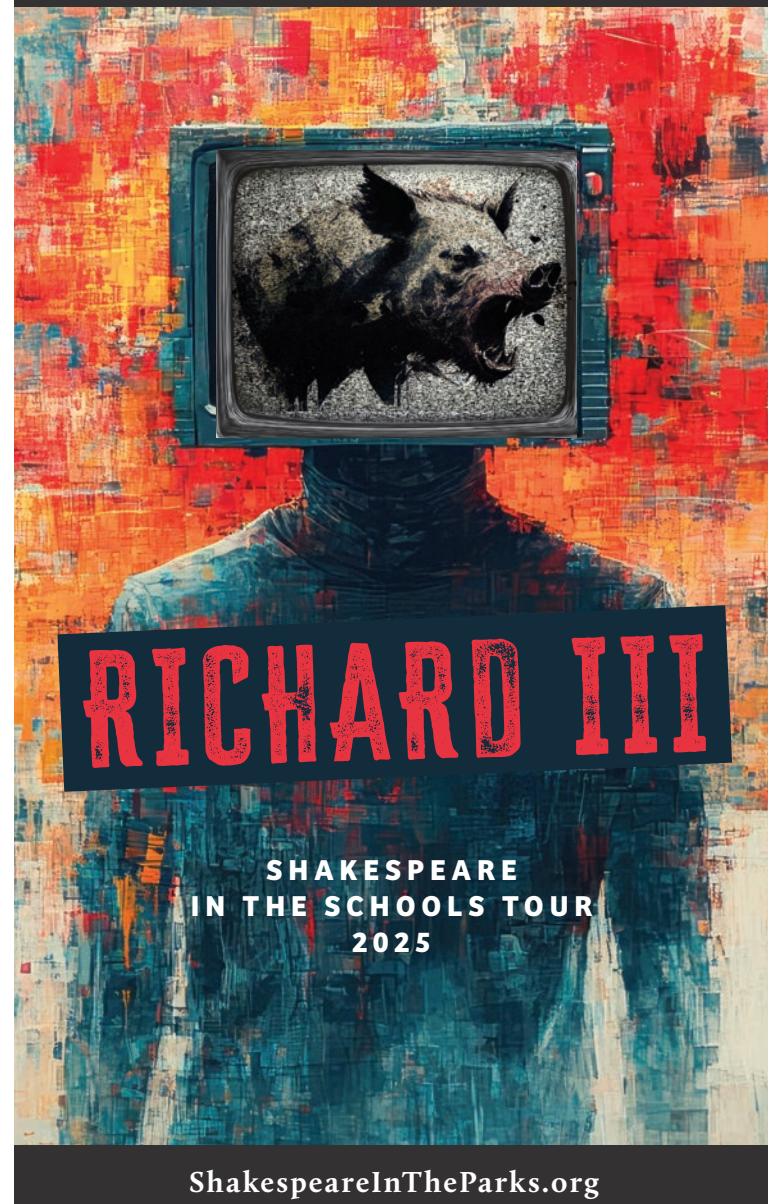
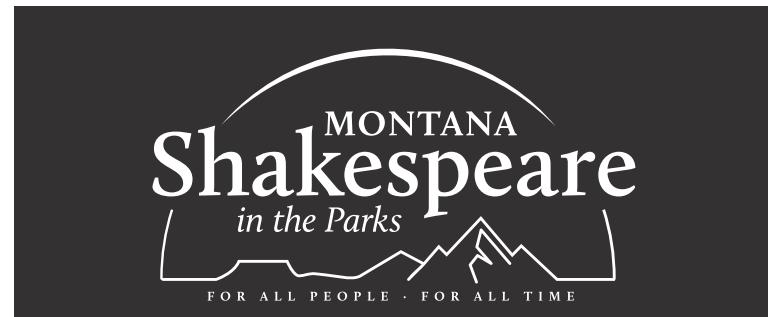
To strengthen his claim to the throne, Richard arranges to have his wife Anne murdered so he can marry King Edward's daughter, Princess Elizabeth.

Richard's plans begin to unravel. After Queen Elizabeth seems to agree to engage the Princess to Richard, she secretly plans to marry her daughter to Richmond, who has recently arrived in England to challenge Richard in battle on Bosworth Field.

The night before the battle, the ghosts of the people Richard has had murdered appear to him in a dream, cursing him and praying for Richmond's success.

Led by Lord Stanley, many of Richard's troops abandon him on the field and join Richmond's side. After fighting bravely, Richard is killed in battle by Richmond, who becomes King Henry VII. Henry's marriage to Princess Elizabeth promises a new era of peace for England, uniting the Houses of York and Lancaster and starting the Tudor era.

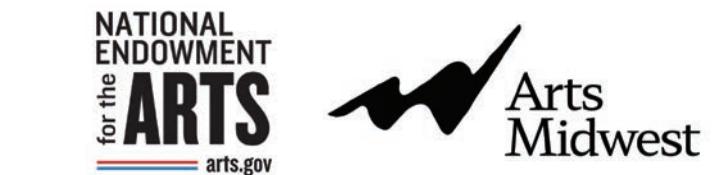
please visit ShakespeareInTheParks.org for more information



RICHARD III

SHAKESPEARE
IN THE SCHOOLS TOUR
2025

ShakespeareInTheParks.org



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The Director



RILEY O'TOOLE

Since 2016, Riley has been involved in 11 tours, 22 productions, and over 700 performances with MSIP across its various programs. He has worked for MSIP as an actor, teaching artist, assistant director, fight director and tour manager, and became the Associate Artistic Director in 2024. Notable MSIP credits include Hamlet in Hamlet, Edgar in King Lear, and Puck in A Midsummer Night's Dream. Riley holds a BFA in Acting from the University

of Minnesota/Guthrie Theater Actor Training Program. He is also an alumnus of the Milwaukee Repertory Theater's Emerging Professional Residency Program. Riley's regional acting credits include the Guthrie Theater, Jungle Theater, Milwaukee Repertory Theater, Arizona Theater Company, and Salt Lake Acting Company.

The Characters

HALEY BASIL – Clarence, Richmond, Mayor, Christopher

JOSHUA HENRY BRELSFORD – Stanley, Brakenbury, Bishop

ESTHER FISHBEIN – Rivers, Prince York, Norfolk, Bishop

ISA GROFSOREAN – Queen Elizabeth, Scrivener, Citizen, Blunt

EVAN JOSLYN – King Edward, Catesby, Guard

GIUSEPPE MICHAEL PIPICELLA – Buckingham, Guard, Oxford

DUSTIN VALENTA – Richard

AHLORA VICTORIA – Lady Anne, Tyrrel, Prince Edward, Citizen



Costume renderings by Angela Cateora

The Actors



HALEY BASIL

Haley is an actor and writer based in Chicago. Originally from Indianapolis, Haley studied acting and playwriting in New York City at Marymount

Manhattan College. She has performed in regional theatres across the East Coast and Midwest. When she's not doing theatre, Haley spends her time watching movies or reading.



JOSHUA HENRY BRELSFORD

Joshua (he/him) is an actor, playwright, and teacher in New York City. He achieved his BFA in Acting from the University

of Minnesota and Guthrie Theater. Past projects include playing "Romeo" (*Romeo & Juliet*, Stage Door Theater), Benjamin the Donkey (*Animal Farm*, Prime Stage Theater) and bringing his original play, *KILN*, to premiere at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. Outside of performing, Joshua enjoys learning tunes on his hammered dulcimer and exploring small towns on his bike.



ESTHER FISHBEIN

Esther (she/her) is a Chicago actor and educator. She has been gracing Chicago stages since she graduated in 2018 with her BFA in acting from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.

Some favorite credits include: Henry V (First Folio Theatre), Midsummer Night's Dream (London Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts) Goodbye Marianne (Goodman Theatre), The Diary of Anne Frank (Young People's Theatre of Chicago), originating her role in the world premier of In Every Generation (Victory Gardens Theatre) and staring in her first commercial this past year! Outside of acting Esther can be found cooking up a storm, reading, teaching music to her 3rd and 4th grade students or spending time with her kitty, Rhiannon.



ISA GROFSOREAN

Isa Grofsorean (she/her) is an actor/educator from Ann Arbor Michigan. She graduated from the University of Minnesota Guthrie Actor Training Program with a BFA in Acting.

While at school, she especially enjoyed playing Thersites in Troilus and Cressida. And most recently she appeared as Catherine in Proof! Outside of acting, Isa enjoys horseback riding, cooking meals with her family, or enthusiastically struggling through dance classes. Isa is very excited to be joining Montana Shakespeare in the Schools!

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE YOUR 16-YEAR-OLD SELF?

What you're hoping for now will eventually come — just give it time.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE YOUR 16-YEAR-OLD SELF?

Love your instincts, and cherish your friends. It is only embarrassing if you allow it to be.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE YOUR 16-YEAR-OLD SELF?

Don't worry about being bad at math. Just focus on being even if it looks totally different than everyone else.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE YOUR 16-YEAR-OLD SELF?

Everything will work itself out, keep going.



EVAN JOSLYN

Evan Joslyn is an actor, teaching artist, and playwright originally from Madison, WI. He is stoked to be making his MSIS debut! He was most recently seen as Malvolio in "Twelfth

Night" (Cleveland Shakespeare Festival), and Steven in the premiere of "The Right Room" (Borderlight Theatre Festival). He spent the past year as an Actor-Teacher with Great Lakes Theater. As a writer, Evan's second fully immersive work, "In the Land of Oz," will be produced this fall (Columbus Children's Theatre). He holds a degree in Theatre from Denison University and furthered his training at the Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey and Gaiety School of Acting in Ireland. Shoutout to his sister, BK, for starting her grad program at MSU. Smiles to Jess and the fam!



GIUSEPPE MICHAEL PIPICELLA

Giuseppe Michael Pipicella (He/Him/His) (Buckingham) is an international actor, active in the United States and his home country Italy. He graduated from the University of Central Florida with a Master

of Fine Arts in Acting by writing a thesis on the marriage between sports and acting. Favorite credits include Charles the Dauphin (Henry VI Part I, Orlando Shakespeare Theater), Mercutio (Romeo and Juliet, Wisconsin Shakespeare Festival), Dromeo of Ephesus (The Comedy of Errors, Hoosier Shakespeare Festival) and Professor Otto Lidenbrock (Journey to the Center of the Earth, REV Theatre Co). His three main passions in life outside of Theatre are soccer, clubbing, and hiking. You can follow him on Instagram @gmpipicella



DUSTIN VALENTA

Dustin Valenta (he/him) is a Chicago-based actor. He graduated from The Theatre School at DePaul University with both his BFA and MFA in Acting. This is his first tour with MSIP, and he's very

excited to be part of the team. Recent Chicago credits include INANIMATE at Theatre Wit, THE CABINET at Victory Gardens' Biograph, and the world premiere of BRIEFLY BREATHLESS (Steppenwolf Lookout). You can also see him in the upcoming film PONDEROSA with Bill Camp and Alexis Bledel. Outside of acting, Dustin loves being outside riding his bike, hiking, playing any number of sports, or just generally running around with his partner, Jocelyn. He's also an avid yoga practitioner and credits the practice with saving his life after a serious bike accident.



AHLORA VICTORIA

Ahlora Victoria (she/her/hers) is incredibly stoked to make her Montana debut! She graduated from the University of California, Santa Barbara in 2024 and relocated to Chicago soon after. Past Shakespearean

appearances include Love's Labour's Lost (Midsommer Flight), The Death of Kings (Verona Shakespeare Fringe Festival), Titus Andronicus (Prague Shakespeare Company), Romeo & Juliet (UC Santa Barbara), and more! In her free time, Ahlora can be found on aerial silks or crocheting while gabbing with her friends. She wants to thank you for your attention, enthusiasm, and support.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE YOUR 16-YEAR-OLD SELF?

Go easy on yourself! Stay hydrated. Wear sunscreen. Forget about a backup plan — live the dream!

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE YOUR 16-YEAR-OLD SELF?

Question, discover, explore... Always!

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE YOUR 16-YEAR-OLD SELF?

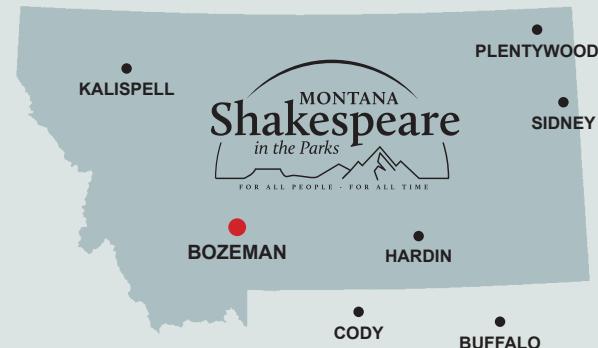
I think I would tell my 16 year old self to spend more time with his parents and sisters, start keeping a gratitude journal, and make friends with the uncertainty of life.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE YOUR 16-YEAR-OLD SELF?

You are not too much, and you never will be.

About Shakespeare in the Schools

Montana Shakespeare in the Parks has been touring since 1973 with a mission to interact directly with the people of Montana and the surrounding states. 32 years ago, we launched Shakespeare in the Schools. The program has grown to include over 50 schools and serves over 12,000 students. Our tour takes us through much of Montana and Wyoming, and in the past we've performed as far away as Chicago, Kentucky, and Philadelphia.



Shakespeare in the Schools travels throughout Montana and northern Wyoming, making a point to perform in smaller communities. This map shows the distance some schools are from our Bozeman base.

2025 Shakespeare in the Schools Tour Schedule

OCTOBER	DECEMBER
3 Willow Creek & Harrison Schools	6 Simms High School
6 Billings West High School	7 Conrad High School
7 Dodson High School	10 Kalispell Middle School
8 Scobey High School	11 Community Performance at Wachholz College Center
9 Bainville High School	12 Browning High School
10 Pine Hills Youth Correctional Facility	13 Polson High School
13 Tongue River High School	14 Plains High School
14 Sheridan High School	17 Ronan High School
15 Buffalo High School	18 Corvallis High School
16 Cody High School	19 Florence-Carlton High School
17 Meeteetse School	20 Lincoln High School
18 Community Performance at Tippet Rise Art Center	21 Loyola Sacred Heart High School
21 Red Lodge High School	24 Petra Academy
22 Powell High School	25 Three Forks High School
23 Ryegate High School	26 Shields Valley High School
24 Columbus High School	
27 Ennis High School	
28 Lone Peak High School	
29 Belgrade High School	
30 Gallatin High School	
31 Headwaters Academy	
NOVEMBER	
3 St. Patrick's Academy East	1 Hardin High School
4 Belt High School	2 Lame Deer High School
5 Highwood High School	3 Hysham High School
	4 Roundup High School
	5 Helena High School
	8 East Helena High School
	9 Capital High School
	10 UM Western
	11 Broadwater High School
	12 Sacajawea Middle School

Costume renderings by Angela Cateora