

# Shakespeare's Henry V: Once More Unto the Breach

Shakespeare's *Henry V* is one of his historical plays about the life of King Henry V of England, particularly covering his role in the Hundred Years War (1337-1453) between France and England. When Henry was king, it was common for kings to lead their troops into battle.

In the passage below, Henry encourages his troops to fight during the siege of Harfleur, a town in France.



## Henry V

by William Shakespeare

Act III Scene 1

Henry: 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,  
Swill'd with the wild and wasteful ocean.

Answer the questions below

1. What is the "breach" Henry is speaking of? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Who is Henry referring to when he says "dear friends"? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. According to Henry, how should a man act during peacetime? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. What is the simile of the brass cannon? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. How does Henry want the men to act now? \_\_\_\_\_  
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\_\_\_\_\_

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**Student's choice; correct answers should reference the following:**

1. What is the "breach" Henry is speaking of? An opening in the city wall
2. Who is Henry referring to when he says "dear friends"? His troops
3. According to Henry, how should a man act during peacetime? quietly and with humility
4. What is the simile of the brass cannon? The men's eyes should bulge out of their sockets like a brass cannon out of a ship's porthole.
5. How does Henry want the men to act now? Wild and savage.