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Henry VIII

William Shakespeare · *1613 · original English text (Project Gutenberg #1541)*

I come no more to make you laugh. Things now that bear a weighty and a serious brow, sad, high, and working, full of state and woe, the Prologue says, we now present. The hosted text is Shakespeare's English, Project Gutenberg #1541, a late history. For grades 10–12. Quote the Prologue, not only the list of scenes. Teach with gravity.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

What kind of history is this late play of a king, a discarded queen, a fallen minister, and a christening, and how should a school read its "serious brow" without turning the divorce into gossip?

"I come no more to make you laugh. Things now That bear a weighty and a serious brow, Sad, high, and working, full of state and woe, Such noble scenes as draw"

The Prologue

The Prologue promises scenes of state and woe, not a comedy. Katherine of Aragon, Wolsey, the king's new marriage, Cranmer, and the christening of Elizabeth all belong to the play. Teach the discarded queen's dignity, the minister's fall, and the official hope at the close, for grades 10–12, with gravity. This is a late history in the Shakespeare folio as hosted here. Quote the Prologue, not the table of scenes, and not a later film.

KEY CHARACTERS

The Prologue
Who comes no more to make you laugh, and asks for pity

Queen Katherine
The discarded queen, written with dignity; teach her with gravity

Wolsey
The minister who rises and falls in a dangerous court

King Henry
The power under which marriage, office, and blessing all turn

NO MORE TO MAKE YOU LAUGH

> *"I come no more to make you laugh. Things now That bear a weighty and a serious brow, Sad, high, and working, full of state and woe, Such noble scenes as draw"*
>
> The Prologue

Grades 10–12
Read the full text free at classicslaunch.org.

01

The Prologue's Serious Brow

THE PROLOGUE

The speaker comes no more to make you laugh. The scenes will be sad, high, and working, full of state and woe, such as draw the eye to flow. Those that can pity are the audience the play asks for.

- The first lines are exact.
- This is PG #1541, a late history, catalogue 10–12.
- Quote the Prologue, not the list of scenes.
- The play tells you at the door that it is not a jest.

> *"I come no more to make you laugh. Things now That bear a weighty and a serious brow, Sad, high, and working, full of state and woe, Such noble scenes as draw"*
>
> The Prologue

02

Katherine

THE QUEEN'S SCENES

Katherine of Aragon stands in this play with dignity, in the council and in her trial-like hearings. Teach her as the play writes her, a wronged queen, not as a later argument only.

- Gravity. Tact on the divorce. This is not gossip.
- Do not reduce her to a single famous speech if you have not also taught the situation.
- Keep the name as the play spells it.
- 10–12.

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> The Prologue

03

Wolsey's Fall

THE MIDDLE

The great minister rises and is brought down. Pride, office, and a sudden loss of favor are the play's warning about a court.

- Teach the fall as a moral and political fact.
- The king remains the power under which men rise and fall.
- Quote this file, not a later biography.
- Gravity.

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04

A Christening, and a Hope

THE CLOSE

The play ends in the official hope of a royal child, Elizabeth. Teach that close as the play writes it, as a public blessing spoken in a dangerous court, not as a simple happy ending, and not as a later national myth only.

- Finish the play. The Prologue's woe and the last blessing belong together.
- Do not import a later history of Elizabeth backward into the last scene.
- Catalogue 10–12.
- Not a later film.

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> The Prologue

05

A Late History

THE PLAY AS A WHOLE

The hosted file presents this as Shakespeare's Henry VIII, 1613, PG #1541, complete. A school should read the Prologue and the queen, not only the pageantry.

- The folio play as hosted here is the text to quote.
- Do not turn the divorce into gossip.
- The first words are the right first quotation.
- For grades 10–12.

> *"I come no more to make you laugh. Things now That bear a weighty and a serious brow, Sad, high, and working, full of state and woe, Such noble scenes as draw"*
>
> The Prologue

A Serious Brow | A Queen's Dignity | A Minister's Fall | A Public Blessing | A Dangerous Court

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 10–12

1. The Prologue opens: "I come no more to make you laugh. Things now That bear a weighty and a serious brow, Sad, high, and working, full of state and woe, We now present." Quote the Prologue, not the list of scenes.
2. This is Shakespeare's late history, 1613, PG #1541. For grades 10–12. Gravity. Not a later film.
3. Teach Katherine's dignity, and do not turn the divorce into gossip.
4. Wolsey's fall is a warning about a court. The close is a public blessing at Elizabeth's christening; do not treat it as a simple happy ending or as a later national myth only.
5. Read the Prologue and the queen, not only the pageantry.

Quotations are verbatim from the original English text (Project Gutenberg #1541), Project Gutenberg #1541, the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/henry-viii/. Citations give book and chapter (or canto and line) so every line can be checked.