



AT THE BEVERLEY CENTER FOR THE ARTS

2025 Shakespeare-in-the-Schools Tour

Henry IV

Classroom Study Guide & Teacher Toolkit



The content of this study guide, and the resources within it, were created by the Utah Shakespeare Festival Education Department. This Study Guide is designed to pair with the specific 75-minute cutting of the play performed on tour.

Meet the Cast!

Calvin Adams (he/him) - Northumberland/Falstaff/Glendower

From: Minneapolis, MN

What's your favorite part about Henry IV?

The many different, complicated father/son relationships all over this play resonate so much with so many different connections I have in my own life.

What can modern audiences learn from Henry IV?

When we don't talk to each other, and ask honestly for what we need, we can develop grudges and resentment and unnecessary conflict.



Elijah Eliakim Hernandez (they/them) - Hotspur/Gadshill/Traveler/Sheriff

From: Houston, TX

How long have you been acting?

I have been a professional actor for 3 years, but I started acting when I was in junior high.

What was your most embarrassing moment on stage?

During a performance of Hamlet, I sat down as Horatio and completely ripped my pants onstage... and remained onstage... for ten minutes.



Adam Koda (he/him) - Lancaster/Poins/Mortimer/Douglas

From: Silicon Valley, CA

What's your favorite role, play, or theatre you've worked with?

My favorite production ever was a pirate themed Twelfth Night where I played Orsino! It was full of swashbuckling, pirate shanties, and the costumes were AWESOME!!! It was put on by the New Swan Shakespeare Festival in Southern California.

What can modern audiences learn from Henry IV?

It's never too late to change. All a person needs is the will power to take the first step, and the strength to keep on walking down that new path.



Kenneth Miller (he/him) - King Henry IV/Peto

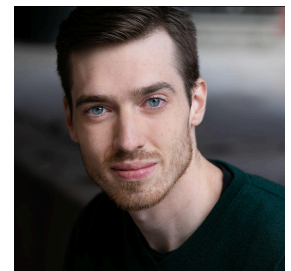
From: Milwaukee, WI

How long have you been acting?

I've been working in theatre for 15 years. I started when I was in a community theatre production of The Hobbit

What's something you love about Shakespeare's plays?

I love that Henry IV and the history plays in general all challenge easy notions of right and wrong.



Lucas Prizant (he/him) - Prince Hal

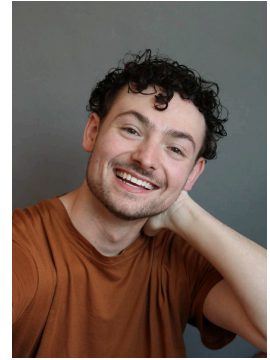
From: Chicago, IL

What was your most embarrassing moment on stage?

During a production of As You Like It, with an actor on my back, I ran at full speed into a pole I did not see. What was worse was I did it again and the second time derailed the show because each actor was laughing too hard to continue.

What's something you love about *Henry IV*?

I love Henry IV because it is a coming of age story hidden inside an Epic. The setting is a legendary war but the heart of the play is about young men finding themselves.



Anna Rock (she/her) - Worcester/Bardolph/Traveler/Carrier

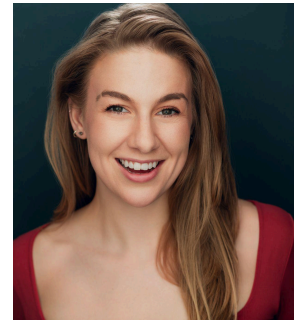
From: Washington, DC

What's your favorite role you've performed?

I performed the Mr. Bingley/Mary Bennet track in Kate Hamill's adaptation of Pride & Prejudice, which I adored because those two characters are complete opposites. Bingley was a golden retriever and Mary was essentially goth, and I got to run around screaming and making impossibly fast quick changes.

What is something you love about Shakespeare?

I love that Shakespeare's writing is full of clues as to how it could be performed. Attacking a new piece of text feels like codebreaking.



Sierra Miguela Tune (she/her) - Westmoreland/Vernon/Hostess/Traveler

From: Colorado

What's something you love about *Henry IV*?

I love that Henry IV asks and explores varying answers to the question "How far are you willing to go for the people you love?"

What can modern audiences learn from *Henry IV*?

That being careless with our words and influences we have over others can be really detrimental to their mental health and their view on the world.



Historical Timeline

1399 Richard II is overthrown by the Lancastrian usurpation. Henry Bolingbroke comes to power and is crowned Henry IV of England on October 13th.

1402-1403 Henry IV wins the battle at Homildon Hill and the events dramatized in *Henry IV* unfold, ending with the Battle of Shrewsbury.

1413 Henry IV dies. His son, 'Hal', begins his reign as Henry V. His leadership as a warrior-king inspires an increase in English nationalism.

1558 Elizabeth I takes the throne as Queen of England

1564 William Shakespeare is born in Stratford-Upon-Avon, England

1587 The second edition of *Holinshed's Chronicles of England* is published, a text many historians believe was Shakespeare's main resource for his history plays.

1592 Shakespeare is listed as a member of the Lord Chamberlain's Men, an acting company which debuted many of Shakespeare's most famous plays.

1597 *Henry IV* is first performed sometime this year

1600 The first recorded performance of *Henry IV* takes place on March 6th

1603 Queen Elizabeth dies March 24th, King James I of England is coronated July 25th

1604 Shakespeare's theater company, the Lord Chamberlain's Men, becomes the King's Men

1616 Shakespeare dies

1622 Sir Edward Dering creates a manuscript of *Henry IV pts 1&2*. The Dering Manuscript is the earliest recorded manuscript of any Shakespearean text.

1623 The First Folio, a collection of 36 Shakespeare plays including *Henry IV*, is published seven years after Shakespeare's death

1649-1660 England experiences the interregnum; a time of Protestant rule during which all theatre was outlawed

1660 Theatres reopen in a period that comes to be known as the Restoration; Shakespeare starts to regain popularity as source text that theatre makers re-wrote to suit their needs

2025 *Henry IV* comes to your school 428 years after its first performance, presented by USF's Shakespeare in the Schools program!

Context

Henry IV was written sometime around 1597, during a complicated period of English history. While the country had finally entered an era of stability free from monarchical turnover, there were ongoing tensions with Spain and Ireland which increased tax burdens and decreased the standard of living. Religious turmoil was also ongoing, as Elizabeth followed through with her father Henry VIII's conversion to Anglicanism, forcing English Catholics into prison or exile. In order to maintain a sense of order and nationalism, Elizabeth often employed forms of propaganda celebrating her reign and the English identity. Therefore, it's important to remember that Shakespeare's plays, specifically his histories, were often a glorification of the Tudor dynasty. In other words, Elizabeth's ancestors were the heroes and their opponents were the villains.

Henry IV is an excellent example of this Tudor posturing. The play encompasses the early days of Henry IV following his ascension to the throne and establishment of the House of Lancaster, which would later pass its claims to the Tudor dynasty. Despite the play's title, the main character is the son, Prince Hal, who would later become King Henry V. Despite a less reputable youth which troubles his father, Hal would become a warrior king famous for defeating the French in the Hundred Years' War and establishing England as a global power. Understandably, Shakespeare wrote three plays chronicling the life of a historical figure as monumental as Henry V: *Henry IV, Parts 1 & 2* act as origin stories outlining his youth, while *Henry V* dramatizes his reign and military leadership.

One might assume that *Henry IV* would only resonate with English audiences of the late 16th century considering the context in which it was written, but time has proven this assumption incorrect. Even as a 'prequel' to *Henry V*, the play is consistently produced and considered by many as one of Shakespeare's greatest works. The story fills the gaps between historical events with powerful themes of adolescence, responsibility, identity, and service.

While it is important to acknowledge the propagandistic elements of the play, Shakespeare's masterful storytelling transcends the political pressure that may have motivated his writing.

Synopsis

The play opens with **King Henry IV** in a state of anxiety. He has recently won the crown in a power struggle following the weak leadership of his predecessor, Richard II, but fears the threat of rebellion. To make matters worse, his son, **Hal**, has little interest in being a prince and instead spends his time partying with a band of robbers in Eastcheap, a neighborhood known for its riotous nightlife. Hal's entourage includes thieves **Peto** and **Bardolph**, drunken knight **Falstaff**, and his close friend **Poins**. We meet the group in the midst of one of their schemes: Falstaff, Peto, and Bardolph plot a robbery, while Poins and Hal secretly plan to rob their friends

in disguises and return the money. In a soliloquy, Hal acknowledges this behavior isn't fitting for a prince, but claims he will reform himself when the time is right.

At the same time, the King meets with the Percy family, **Northumberland** and his brother **Worcester**, to discuss the growing rebellion in both Scotland and Wales. With them is Northumberland's son **Harry 'Hotspur' Percy**, an energetic but intense soldier who is in many ways a complete opposite of Prince Hal's prodigal ways. Hotspur has just won a victory against **Douglas**, a Scottish Earl, but refuses to deliver his prisoners of war to Henry. Instead he asks the King to pay ransom to **Glendower**, leader of the Welsh rebellion, to release **Mortimer**, Hotspur's brother-in-law, who has been taken hostage. The King refuses to pay the ransom due to the news of Mortimer marrying Glendower's daughter. After Henry leaves, Worcester reveals to Hotspur that Mortimer was the original choice for the throne, so the King must be keeping him in exile to avoid a potential fight for the crown. Outraged by the refusal to help his family, Hotspur vows to depose Henry and reinstate the Percy family as rulers of England.

Following the robbery (and Hal's prank), the Eastcheap group meets at the Boar's Head Tavern, where Hal calls out Falstaff for his embellished recounting of the night and reveals he and Poinc were the disguised robbers. Falstaff claims he recognized the Prince and refused to fight back out of respect. They are interrupted by a messenger who informs them Hotspur and his family have left for Wales in an apparent act of rebellion and that Hal has been summoned home by the King. Anticipating an uncomfortable conversation with his father, Hal role-plays the meeting with his friends. Back at the court, his father reprimands him for his wild lifestyle and confesses that even though Hotspur is leading a rebellion, the King admires his integrity more than his own son's. Moved by his father's honesty, Hal promises to reform himself immediately and fight bravely against the rebels.

The rebel forces begin crumbling internally, with intrapersonal strife between Hotspur and Glendower. Hotspur's father Northumberland falls sick and cannot assist with the battle. Glendower's men are delayed fourteen days, leaving Hotspur and his men alone against the King and Hal. In an attempt to negotiate peace, Worcester meets with the Prince and King. Hal offers to spare both armies bloodshed by settling the war with a one-on-one battle between him and Hotspur. The King promises he will accept the rebels back with kindness if they surrender. Worcester promises to relay this offer to Hotspur, but lies and says no negotiation was made when he returns to the rebel camp. Vastly outnumbered, the rebels fight against the King's men. Prince Hal and Hotspur duel and in a moment that determines the future of England, Hal is victorious.

Character List

House of Lancaster

King Henry IV - Recently coronated king of England

Hal, Prince of Wales - King Henry's eldest son, known for his reckless lifestyle

John, Earl of Lancaster - Henry's second son, Hal's younger brother

Earl of Westmorland - the King's brother-in-law

House of Percy

Earl of Worcester - Lead influence in the rebellion

Harry 'Hotspur' Percy - Worcester's ambitious nephew

Earl of Northumberland - Hotspur's father, Worcester's brother

Earl of Douglas - Leader of Scottish rebels who conspired with the Percy family

Vernon - A messenger for the rebel forces

Mortimer - Brother-in-law of Hotspur. Original choice to inherit the crown. Held hostage in Wales

Glendower - Mortimer's father-in-law. A Welsh leader who believes he has supernatural powers.

Eastcheap

Sir John Falstaff - An oafish knight and friend of Hal, known for his cowardice

Poins - Hal's closest friend

Peto, Bardolph, Gadshill - Thieves and friends of Hal.

Hostess - Owner of the Boar's Head Tavern, the frequent hangout of Hal's entourage in Eastcheap

Central Character Analysis

Hal, Prince of Wales

Like many teenagers, Hal is taking his time growing up. He recognizes that adulthood means giving up the reckless lifestyle he has been enjoying, so he avoids his father and the court. Unlike most teenagers, however, Hal's station in life has already been thrust upon him. As a prince, the aspects of adulthood which most young people can procrastinate—nobility, leadership, poise, etc.—are the very qualities he is expected to have mastered at his age. Hal explains to the audience that he plans on reforming himself when necessary, foreshadowing the rebellion that will require his maturity later in the play.

Henry IV, King of England

King Henry, formerly Henry Bolingbroke, has come into leadership through a power struggle. The former king, Richard II, did not want Henry to replace him, but due to weak leadership, was unable to prevent Henry's claim to the throne. Due to the civil unrest caused by this process, Henry has not won the hearts of the people. Anxious about his future, he laments the fact his son Hal lives so carelessly and seeks stability in his court.

Harry 'Hotspur' Percy

Harry earned the nickname 'Hotspur' from his bravery in battle, energetic ambition, and short temper. Hotspur is in many ways the opposite of Hal: he is obsessed with honor and will defend his family's name at all costs. Hotspur helped Henry IV in his struggle for the throne, but now feels the King has abandoned the Percy family. Motivated by his uncle Worcester, Hotspur becomes the muscle of the rebellion.

Earl of Worcester, Thomas Percy

The first interaction between Worcester and King Henry proves the lack of trust between the leaders. Disgruntled by the way he and his family are treated in the court, Worcester convinces his nephew Hotspur to join a rebellion by convincing him that his brother-in-law Mortimer is the rightful heir to the throne. He is manipulative, shrewd, and the mastermind behind the plot.

Sir John Falstaff

Though technically a knight, Falstaff has the reputation of a con-man, coward, and drunk. Despite his flaws, he is a close friend of Prince Hal and often mooches off his royal title to avoid the consequences of his actions. Falstaff acts as a sort of father-figure to Hal while the Prince avoids his home at the court.

Pre-Show Discussion Questions

1. Many stories in literature, film, and drama are labeled as ‘coming of age’. In literary criticism, the official term is ‘bildungsroman’, which translates to “education novel” in German. What does this term mean to you? What do you think a story needs to be considered ‘coming of age’?
2. A common trend throughout history is young people dealing with the consequences of their elders’ choices. What is the younger generation’s responsibility when handling situations passed down to them? What inherited consequences do young people have to deal with in today’s society?
3. We do not choose where or when we are born, yet both play a large role in determining the trajectory of our lives. How much of our destiny is determined by forces outside of our control? How much say do we get in mapping out our own futures?
4. Think of a friend or family member who influences the way you talk, joke, or behave. Now, think of someone who influences you to act entirely differently. (OR Think of a joke or story you would tell in front of one family member or friend, but not in front of another.) In what ways do different environments change the way we act? What factors influence our decisions in these settings?
5. Honor, or the defense of honor, often drives individuals to actions they otherwise would not attempt. What is your definition of honor? Should it be defended? If so, how?
6. How do parents, or parental figures, impact the lives of young people? How does the relationship change over time? What qualities should one have when fulfilling a parental role?

Themes:

Transformation and Maturity

Many of Shakespeare's most famous characters are teenagers or young adults: Romeo, Juliet, Hamlet, Helena, Hermia, etc. Whereas these characters are fictional and limited to their "hour upon the stage", Prince Hal is a real historical figure whose legacy, at the time *Henry IV* was written, was celebrity status. Shakespeare faced the challenge of not only writing a convincing portrayal of Hal's teenage years, but also showing the growth from truant prince to noble king. This challenge, faced by many authors, ultimately makes *Henry IV* a coming-of-age story, with Hal's transformation a necessary step in securing himself a place in English history.

- Is there a moment in the play that you believe dramatically shifts Hal's personal growth? If so, which moment and why?
- Hotspur is a character foil to Hal, meaning their differences highlight their opposing traits, values, and motivations. Both characters, however, are young and growing into their identities. In what ways does their youth benefit them? In what ways does it hold them back?
- What do you think of Hal's promise that he will reform himself when those around him least expect it? He claims that if he was a perfect prince all of the time, his nobility would become mundane and predictable. Do you agree with this method? Is this a sign of maturity or childishness?

Generational Debts

A common trend in Shakespeare's plays, especially his histories, is the need for characters to 'clean up the messes' left behind from earlier generations. In this play, Hal must deal with the fact that his father illegitimately took the crown and by default made him a prince. Hotspur must navigate a world where his family lost their political power, limiting his own future prospects. Because these issues predate the individual, it's more difficult to differentiate right from wrong. When constructing an antagonist in play, some writers might create a completely irredeemable character, but Shakespeare expertly crafts a more well-rounded, human villain. Hotspur's rebellion may look like a quest for revenge on the surface, but from Hotspur's perspective standing up for his family is the most honorable thing he can do, regardless if it's considered treasonous.

- Hal describes his role as prince as a "debt [he] never promised." What do you think he means by this? How is his role as prince a 'debt' to society?

- The two youths in the play, Hal and Hotspur, are acting on behalf of their elders: Hal fights for his father and future role as king, while Hotspur fights for his family name. Shakespeare alludes to this representative style of combat through Hal's suggestion to fight one-on-one as opposed to a full battle. How do these inherited responsibilities affect the outcome of the play? How do you think it will affect the future generations?
- If Hal (later Henry V) was a celebrity-status historical figure to audiences when this play debuted, why do you think Shakespeare made the antagonists (Hotspur and his family) more human instead of an embodiment of evil?

Destiny and Obligations

Destiny (or fate) and the obligations one must follow through with as a result are also central themes of *Henry IV*. In the play, Shakespeare explores the idea that certain events are predetermined by forces beyond human control. Even when humans fight against their destiny, like Hal at the beginning of *Henry IV*, their efforts ultimately fail, even if not in a way they expected. This naturally raises the question of how much control do characters actually have over their lives, how much has already been decided, and

- Individualism and the concept of mapping your own destiny was popularized during the Age of Enlightenment, long after the events of the play took place. In what ways might this play look different if written a few hundred years later?
- During the early 1400s, when this play takes place, many English citizens believed in the Divine Right of Kings, which meant monarchs were chosen by God to lead their people. Considering the historical context of English royalty, is the King justified in expecting so much from Hal? How might King Henry's claim to the throne by way of force complicate these expectations?

The Influence of Environment

How one spends their time—and who they spend it with—greatly affects identity. Similar to the themes of destiny and fate, Shakespeare explores the range of social influence over what some would argue are predetermined events in *Henry IV* as well as the differentiation between nature and nurture. For example, Hotspur's ambitious energy preexists the events of the play and is therefore his nature, but associating with this uncle nurtures the desire to rebel. In contrast, Hal nurtures a life of delinquency with Falstaff and his friends, but his innate virtue overpowers their influence. Considering the political motivations of Shakespeare's histories, it's understandable that the protagonists are portrayed as so inherently good that social influence has no sway over their noble actions, while their antagonist counterparts cave to external pressure.

- Why do you think Hal prefers the company of thieves and drinkers rather than the royal court? What does this environment provide that his father cannot?
- Why do you think Shakespeare included the Eastcheap tavern scenes in this play, as opposed to just mentioning that Hal was spending time there? What does it tell the audience about Hal or the state of affairs in England?
- Imagine a different version of this play where Hal was more like Hotspur (ambitious, quick-tempered) and Hotspur was more like Hal (introspective, calculating). How would the story change?

Honor and its Consequences

Honor is perhaps the greatest motivator for the characters of *Henry IV*. Hotspur calls upon it the moment he suspects the King is disrespecting his family. Hal flippantly toys with the perception of honor to trick men into thinking he'll be a poor ruler while secretly intending to be a good one. The King holds it over Hal's head when he confronts his son about his duties as prince. Shakespeare's inclusion of honor on each character's personal list of values raises the question: how can the same principle, which is never defined, influence people in such different ways? One could argue that honor is a reflection of the individual's conscience. For Hotspur, a skilled warrior who settles issues through violence, honor is achieved by victory on the battlefield. For King Henry, who prioritizes stability, honor is the royal title of king, which he achieved by means many would consider dishonorable. Hal, having grown up under this latter definition, most likely recognizes the negative extremes of honor and approaches it with reason. Only Falstaff sees honor as strictly decorative, lacking substance, probably as a reflection of his lack of conscience.

- Honor motivates a majority of the play's action, yet is never defined. How would you define honor? Is there a character in the play that interprets honor closest to your definition?
- While most characters in the play take honor very seriously, Falstaff questions its relevance in the face of battle, asking "what is in that word, 'honor'?" He compares honor to a "scutcheon", which is a decorative emblem usually displayed on a coffin. What do you think Falstaff means by this? How might his definition differ from other characters in the play?

Family

Because the antagonists of Henry IV are fellow Englishmen, the question of loyalty in this play is less about nationalism and more about family. Hal's obligation to his father is mirrored by Hotspur's obligation to the Percy name. It's a bit ironic then that both sides of the fight struggle

internally. The King openly compares his son to Hotspur and bemoans his behavior. The audience never gets to know exactly what Hal thinks of his dad, but his avoiding the court and spending time in Eastcheap tells us enough about their relationship. Similarly, Hotspur and his father Northumberland have several scenes together, but Hotspur rarely addresses him and gives most of his attention to his uncle Worcester. Even when Northumberland gets sick and cannot join the battle, Hotspur shows no sign of concern, only frustration that his father has complicated his plans.

- Both Hotspur and Hal have ‘alternative’ father figures. Hal enjoys the company of older knight Falstaff, while Hotspur is clearly influenced by his uncle Worcester. How do these relationships influence key plot points of the play?
- The King mentions twice that he wishes his son was more like Hotspur. How might this complicate Hal’s relationship with his father given the pressure of carrying on his family’s royal title?
- At the beginning of the play, Hal calls his future role as king a “debt he never promised.” At the end of the play, when he saves his father from Douglas in battle, he states “it is the Prince of Wales that threatens thee, who never promiseth but he means to pay.” Do you think there is a connection between these quotes? How might the context of both scenes play into their interpretation?

Class Activities

Lesson Plan: Id, Ego, and Superego

In psychoanalysis, the ‘id, ego, and superego’ represent the motivating forces of the human mind. The ‘superego’ reflects cultural and personal rules and ultimately aims for perfection, regardless of the cost. The ‘id’ is the complete opposite, seeking primal needs and pleasures without thinking of the consequences. In between, the ‘ego’ balances these forces with rational decision making.



Id:
Instincts



Ego:
Reality



Superego:
Morality

Oftentimes in art and literature, the id, ego, and superego are represented by characters in a narrative. Perhaps the most memorable example is found in the Disney classic *The Emperor's New Groove*. Watch this [clip](#) and discuss how it is an example of the three identities.

Questions:

1. Think about the characters from *Henry IV*. Who would you choose to represent the id, ego, or superego?
2. What other movies, books, plays, or stories have similar characters?
3. Why do you think these identities are recurring in different forms of storytelling? How does the reader/audience use these characters to better understand the story?

Lesson Plan: Defining Honor

Read the following speech from Act V scene 1, known as ‘Falstaff’s Catechism.’

FALSTAFF

“Honor pricks me on. Yea, but how if honor prick me off when I come on? [How then? Can honor set to a leg? No. Or an arm? No. Or take away the grief of a wound? No. Honor hath no skill in surgery, then? No. What is honor? A word. What is in that word ‘honor’? What is that ‘honor’? Air. A trim reckoning. Who hath it? He that died o’Wednesday. Doth he feel it? No. Doth he hear it? No. ’Tis insensible then? Yea, to the dead. But will it not live with the living? No. Why? Detraction will not suffer it. Therefore I’ll none of it. Honor is a mere scutcheon. And so ends my catechism.”

Words to define:

Catechism: a series of fixed questions, answers, or precepts used for instruction in other situations

Scutcheon: a flat piece of metal for protection and often ornamentation

Falstaff’s cynicism is reflected in his rhetorical questions, which serve to expose the glorification of honor as a shallow pursuit that fails to provide any physical benefits, a dramatically different perspective than the other characters in the play. This attitude is especially prevalent in times of war. Compare Falstaff’s speech to the poem [When You See Millions of the Mouthless Dead](#) by World War I poet Charles Hamilton Sorley.

Questions

1. In what ways are the two texts similar? In what ways are they different?
2. How do you define honor? Does it have any immediate value in moments of crisis?

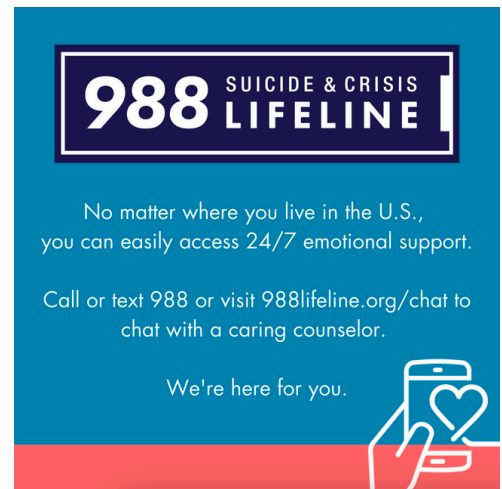
National and State Mental Health Crisis Support

While the atmosphere of *Henry IV* isn't as solemn as some of Shakespeare's other works, the USF Education Team recognizes that the topics of war, violence, personal identity, and fate can feel weighty for younger audiences. While USF strongly believes in Shakespeare's capacity to offer us expansive language to help us process extreme human emotion, we encourage any student struggling with mental health concerns to utilize the following resources.

American Federation of Suicide Prevention
<https://afsp.org/>



Mental Health Resources for Underrepresented Communities
<https://afsp.org/mental-health-resources-for-underrepresented-communities>

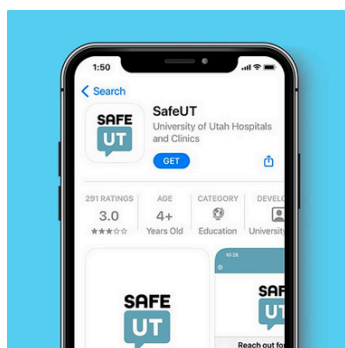



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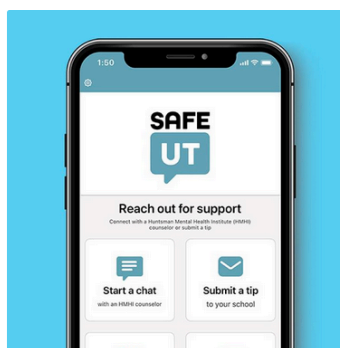


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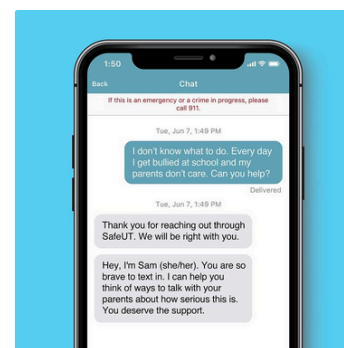
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