

1. 1 Henry IV is a study of contrasts, a clash of antitheses, not only between characters, but between political sides and ideologies, between classes, even between scenes and locales. As you read through this play, catalog these contrasts. Which conflicts or oppositions seem most important? Why does Shakespeare present so many?
2. Speak to the metaphors in the first dozen or so lines of the play as implying "Sh's" view of rebellion. To the same purpose, follow the use and development of the astrology-astronomy figure.
3. What does Shakespeare gain or achieve in juxtaposing the first two scenes?
4. How do Falstaff's very first words resonate with or echo the concerns of the play?
5. Do you see any relation between Hal and Falstaff's delight and skill at word games, especially their metaphoric use of language ("unsavory similes" 1.2.66), and the play's larger preoccupations and themes?
6. Analyze Hal's soliloquy at the end of 1.2. ("I know you all . . ."). How does this speech affect your view of Hal? If this speech is Hal's excuse for his "loose behavior," do you accept it? Does this speech reveal his self-understanding or his self-deception?
7. What do you think of Hal's "foil" theory? Does it explain relations/desires and occur elsewhere in the play?
8. Keep Hal's soliloquy in mind as you read the opening of 1.3. Do you hear any echoes in the first speech of the King? If so, what do they signify?
9. In his soliloquy at the end of 1.2 Hal talks of "redeeming time" and hopes to "pay the debt I never promised"; in the next scene Hotspur promises "Yet time serves wherein you may redeem / Your banished honors and restore yourselves" (1.3.180-81) and later talks of the "debt" the King owes them. What do Hal and Hotspur mean by debt-payment and redemption? How do the senses of these words play off each other? Follow up the fiscal imagery in Hal's promise to reform (3.2.129-59). See also 4.3.53 and 5.4.43.
10. Does Hotspur's long speech about the foppish lord serve any purpose? (1.3.29-69)
11. Keep the sequencing of scenes in mind as you read; for example, what about Gadshill (2.2) to Hotspur's castle? (2.3) Or the end of 3.2 with beginning of 3.3?
12. Is 2.1 an interlude or are the carriers and Gadshill emblems of other figures and relations?
13. What is significant about Hal's fellowship with and mastery of the drawers' slang, and his somewhat comic duping of Francis? (2.4.4-97)
14. In what way or how well does Falstaff impersonate the moralizing parent in the figure of Henry IV? (2.4.337-64)
15. What is the effect and import of this exchange? Falstaff: "banish plump Jack, and banish all the world." Hal: "I do, I will" (2.4.407-08)
16. Juxtapose 2.4 (Boar's Head, Falstaff, Hal) to 3.2 (Court, King, Hal) and consider the nature of the relationships being presented, compared, and contrasted. What is Shakespeare up to?
17. Compare and contrast Henry IV to his son Hal. To what extent is Hal his father's son? You might consider 1.1, 3.2, and the battle scenes at play's end. How convincing is Hal's transformation? Does he transform at all?
18. The theme of honor pervades the play. What attitudes does the play and Shakespeare take towards honor? Is honor never questionable? Is honor excellent in certain respects but always questionable and sometimes very wrong? Is honor, in Falstaff's words, "nothing?"
19. Elizabethans generally believed that history conformed to a moral pattern, that one could learn how to behave in the present by studying the past. Does the play support this idea?
20. Is Sir Walter Blunt a fool? (5.3.22)
21. Any "reverberation" in the line Hal speaks to his younger brother: "By God, thou hast deceived me, Lancaster?" (5.4.17)
22. Pair Hal's soliloquy (1.2) with Henry's line near the close: "Thou hast redeemed thy lost opinion" (5.4.48). Any comments?
23. Pair Hal's disposing of his chief prisoner (5.5.22 ff.) with Hotspur denying his prisoners to the king (1.1.92-94).
24. Is the play necessarily open ended? How? Why?
25. Analyze the idea, purpose, and imagery of counterfeiting that keeps surfacing in this play.
26. Read Greenblatt's essay "Invisible Bullets." Can you extend or challenge his thesis about the production and containment of subversion in this play?