SYNOPSIS OF KING HENRY VI PARTS 1, 2, AND 3

The play begins with the funeral of Henry V, who has died unexpectedly in his prime. Baby Henry VI is not old enough to take the crown. A rebellion, led by the Dauphin Charles, is gaining momentum, and several major towns have already been lost. Additionally, Lord Talbot, Constable of France, has been captured. Realising a critical time is at hand, Duke Hnery of Gloucester remains in charge in England and Bedford goes to France to find Talbot.

Meanwhile, in Orléans, the English army are laying siege to Charles' forces. Inside the city, the Bastard of Orléans approaches Charles and tells him of a young woman who claims to have seen visions and knows how to defeat the English. Charles summons the woman, Joan la Pucelle, (i.e. Joan of Arc). To test her resolve, he challenges her to single combat. Upon her victory, he immediately places her in command of the army.

Outside the city, the newly arrived Bedford negotiates the release of Talbot, but immediately, Joan launches an attack. The French forces win, forcing the English back, but Talbot and Bedford engineer a sneak attack on the city, and gain a foothold within the walls, causing the French leaders to flee—Talbot is released.

Back in England, the Duke of York and the Duke of Lancaster are fighting about trivial things—they ask the whole court to pick sides and wear white or red roses to show their allegiance. (The Duke of York’s family is a descendant of Richard II and therefore are the original heirs to the throne having been deposed by the current king’s line).

In France, within a matter of hours, the French retake and then lose the city of Rouen. After the battle, Bedford dies, and Talbot assumes direct command of the army. The Dauphin is horrified at the loss of Rouen, but Joan tells him not to worry. She then persuades the powerful Duke of Burgundy, who had been fighting for the English, to switch sides, and join the French

In an attempt to make peace between Lancaster and York, Henry places York in command of the infantry andLancaster in command of the cavalry. Meanwhile, Talbot approaches Bordeaux, but the French army swing around and trap him. Talbot sends word for reinforcements, but the conflict between York and Lancaster leads them to second guess one another, and neither of them send any, both blaming the other for the mix-up. The English army are subsequently destroyed, and both Talbot and his son are killed.

After the battle, Joan's visions desert her, and she is captured by Richard, and burned at the stake. The British make a resounding victory.Meanwhile, the Earl of Suffolk has captured a young French princess, Margaret of Anjou, whom he intends to marry to Henry in order that he can dominate the king through her. Travelling back to England, he attempts to persuade Henry to marry Margaret. Gloucester advises Henry against the marriage, as Margaret's family are not rich, and the marriage is not advantageous to his position as king, but Henry is taken in by Suffolk's description of Margaret's beauty, and he agrees to the proposal. Suffolk then heads back to France to bring Margaret to England as Gloucester worryingly ponders what the future may hold.

The play begins with the marriage of King Henry VI of England to the young Margaret of Anjou. Margaret is still secretly with Suffolk, who aims to influence the king through her. The major obstacle to Suffolk and Margaret's plan is the Lord Protector; Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, who is extremely popular with the common people and deeply trusted by the King. Gloucester's wife, however, has designs on the throne, and has been led by an agent of Suffolk to dabble in necromancy. She summons a spirit and demands it reveal the future to her, but its prophecies are vague and before the ritual is finished, she is interrupted and arrested. At court she is then banished, greatly to the embarrassment of Gloucester. Suffolk then conspires with Cardinal Beaufort and the Duke of Somerset to bring about Gloucester's ruin. Suffolk accuses Gloucester of treason and has him imprisoned, but before Gloucester can be tried, Suffolk sends two assassins to kill him. Meanwhile, Richard, 3rd Duke of York, reveals his claim to the throne[h] to the Earls of Salisbury and Warwick, who pledge to support him.

Suffolk is banished for his role in Gloucester's death. Margaret, horrified at Suffolk's banishment, vows to ensure his return, but he is killed by pirates shortly after leaving England, and his head sent back to the distraught Margaret. Meanwhile, York has been appointed commander of an army to suppress a revolt in Ireland. Before leaving, he enlists a former officer of his, Jack Cade, to stage a popular revolt in order to ascertain whether the common people would support York should he make an open move for power. At first, the rebellion is successful, and Cade sets himself up as Mayor of London, but his rebellion is put down when Lord Clifford (a supporter of Henry) persuades the common people, who make up Cade's army, to abandon the cause. Cade is killed several days later by a man into whose garden he climbs looking for food.

York returns to England with his army and seeing his Jack Cade plan failed, storms Henry’s castle supported by his sons, Edward and Richard. The English nobility take sides, some supporting the House of York, others supporting Henry and the House of Lancaster. A battle is fought at St Albans in which the Duke of Lancaster is killed by Richard, and Lord Clifford by York. With the battle lost, Margaret persuades the distraught King to flee the battlefield and head to London. She is joined by Young Clifford, who vows revenge on the Yorkists for the death of his father. The play ends with York, Edward, Richard, Warwick and Salisbury setting out in pursuit of Henry, Margaret and Clifford.

The play begins where 2 Henry VI left off, with the victorious Yorkists (York, Edward, Richard) pursuing Henry and Margaret from the battlefield in the wake of the First Battle of St Albans. Upon reaching the parliamentary chambers in London, York seats himself in the throne, and a confrontation ensues between his supporters and Henry's. Threatened with violence by Warwick, who has brought part of his army with him, the King reaches an agreement with York which will allow him to remain king until his death, at which time the throne will permanently pass to the House of York and its descendants. Disgusted with this decision, which would disinherit the King's son, Prince Edward, the King's supporters, led by his wife, Margaret, abandon him, and Margaret declares war on the Yorkists, supported by Clifford, who is determined to exact revenge for the death of his father at the hands of York during the battle of St Albans.

Margaret attacks York's castle at Wakefield, and the Yorkists lose the ensuing battle. During the conflict, Clifford murders York's twelve-year-old son, Rutland. Margaret and Clifford then capture and taunt York himself; forcing him to stand on a molehill, they give him a handkerchief covered with Rutland's blood to wipe his brow, and place a paper crown on his head, before stabbing him to death. After the battle, as Edward and Richard lament York's death. Edwards breaks down into tears, but Richard refuses to cry until his father’s death has been avenged. Warwick brings news that his own army has been defeated by Margaret's at the Second Battle of St Albans, and the King has returned to London, where, under pressure from Margaret, he has revoked his agreement with York.

The Yorkists regroup, and at the Battle of Towton, Clifford is killed and the Yorkists are victorious. Following the battle, Edward is proclaimed king, and Richard, Duke of Gloucester, although he complains to Edward that this is an ominous dukedom. King Edward then leaves the court, and Richard reveals to the audience his ambition to rise to power and take the throne from his brother, although as yet he is unsure how to go about it.

Meanwhile, Henry sits on the molehill York was on and laments his problems. He is met by a father who has killed his son, and a son who has killed his father, representing the horrors of the civil war. Henry is captured by two gamekeepers loyal to Edward, and imprisoned in the Tower of London, while Edward goes to meet the final Lancastrian/French force. In the subsequent Battle of Tewkesbury the Yorkists rout the Lancastrians, capturing Margaret, Prince Edward, and the Duke of Lancaster. Lancaster is sentenced to death, Margaret is banished, and Prince Edward is stabbed to death by the three Plantagenet brothers, who fly into a rage after he refuses to recognise the House of York as the legitimate royal family. At this point, Richard goes to London to kill Henry. At Richard's arrival at the Tower, the two argue, and in a rage Richard stabs Henry. With his dying breath, Henry prophesies Richard's future villainy and the chaos that will engulf the country. Back at court, Edward orders celebrations to begin, believing the civil wars are finally over and lasting peace is at hand. He is unaware, however, of Richard's scheming and his desire for power at any cost.