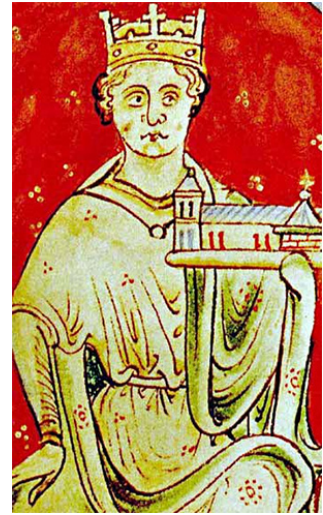


King John by William Shakespeare

The Life and Death of King John dramatises the reign of John, King of England (ruled 1199–1216), the youngest son of Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine, and father of Henry III. The play is believed to have been written around 1595, but was not published until 1623, when it appeared in the *First Folio*. The character of the Bastard emerges as an embodiment of English nationalism, a precursor of Henry V.



ACT 1

King Richard I, the revered 'Lionheart', is dead. The play begins after the coronation of his youngest brother John. The French argue that the English throne rightfully belongs to Arthur, the young son of John's deceased older brother, Geoffrey Plantagenet. War is declared between England and France. During the preparations, an inheritance dispute is brought before King John by the Faulconbridge family. One Faulconbridge brother, Philip (the 'Bastard') is found to be the illegitimate child of Richard the Lionheart. He is immediately knighted, welcomed to Court as a Plantagenet, and joins their military expedition to France.

ACT 2

French and English forces arrive outside the strategic town of Angiers in France. The citizens of the town deny both forces entry until it becomes clear who is the rightful King of England. Both sides fight to prove themselves the rightful King, but both are equally matched. Hubert, an aide to King John, suggests that the French and English could be united if they were to agree a marriage between Lewis the Dauphin, heir to France, and John's niece, Lady Blanche. Both sides approve and a hasty peace is negotiated.

ACT 3

Arthur's mother, Lady Constance, is furious that the French have given up on her son's claim to the English throne. At the wedding celebrations John is visited by Cardinal Pandulph and excommunicated from the Catholic Church for failing to agree to Rome's choice for Archbishop of Canterbury. Pandulph provokes the French into resuming war against the English, to the delight of Constance.

ACT 4

During the ensuing battle the English capture Arthur, and King John orders Hubert to execute the boy. Hubert has a change of heart and lets Arthur live. Believing Arthur dead and suspecting foul play, King John's noblemen leave him and rumours of chaos spread across the land. King John learns that his mother, Queen Eleanor, has died in France, and consequently his territories there are under threat. Hubert admits to King John that Arthur is in fact alive, but this news comes too late as the young boy jumps to his death from the battlements of the castle. Upon finding Arthur's body, King John's noblemen defect to follow Lewis the Dauphin and fight against their fellow Englishmen on English soil.

ACT 5

King John seeks Cardinal Pandulph's help to stop the advancing French forces, and in exchange agrees to obey the Pope's wishes and submit the crown's authority to Rome. On hearing of this agreement, the Bastard is furious, and encourages John to fight to defend his own land, without submission to a foreign power. Despite Pandulph's attempts to broker peace, Lewis the Dauphin refuses to back down from the war. The Bastard is delighted and leads John's forces into battle.

John falls ill on the battlefield and is taken to Swinstead Abbey. The lords learn that they are betrayed by the French and return to John's side. The Bastard wins the day on the field providing an initial victory for the English, but they lose half their forces in the Lincoln tides and are facing defeat as the Bastard escapes. King John dies, leaving his men to face the approaching French forces alone. Young Prince Henry is acclaimed as king. The war rages on.

Synopsis adapted from notes by the RSC

THE STRATFORD-UPON-AVON SOCIETY



King John play reading – Town Hall – Saturday 5 March 2022, 11am – 2pm

Character	Role	Reader
Announcer	Scene and stage directions	Richard Knight
King John	King of England	Roger Pringle
Queen Eleanor	Mother of King John, widow of Henry II	Sandra MacDonald
Prince Henry	Son of King John, later King Henry III	Freddie Beck
Blanche of Castile	John's niece	Anne Blair
Earl of Essex	an English nobleman	Don Hanson
Earl of Salisbury	an English nobleman	Roger Taylor
Earl of Pembroke	an English nobleman	Richard Howarth
Lord Bigot	Earl of Norfolk	Robin Sankey
Peter of Pomfret	a prophet	Jonathan Devereux
Philip Faulconbridge	Also known as Philip the Bastard; natural son of Richard I of England	Paul Edmondson
Robert Faulconbridge	Half-brother of Philip; legitimate son of Sir Robert Faulconbridge	Jonathan Devereux
Lady Faulconbridge	Their mother; widow of Sir Robert Falconbridge	Janet Anslow
James Gurney	Her attendant	Robin Sankey
Lady Constance	Widow of Geoffrey II, Duke of Brittany	Lena Cowen Orlin
Prince Arthur	Son of Constance, King John's nephew, claimant to the English throne	Saul McDougall
Executioner	Henchman of King John	Jonathan Devereux
English Herald	Proclaiming King John	Don Hanson
English Messenger	Bringing news of the English army	Robin Sankey
King Philip	King of France	Stanley Wells
Louis the Dauphin	Son of King Philip	Tim Raistrick
Viscount de Melun Châtillon	French ambassador to England	Jonathan Devereux
Hubert de Burgh	Follower of King John	Lindsay MacDonald
Citizen of Angiers	Equivocator	Don Hanson
French Herald	Proclaiming Prince Arthur	Jonathan Devereux
French Messenger	Bringing news of the French army	Sandra MacDonald
Limoges	Duke of Austria	David Dumper
Cardinal Pandolf	Legate from Pope Innocent III	Brian Russell