

# HANK CINQUE

TEN-MINUTE PLAY

By Gary Peterson

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## **HANK CINQUE**

A ten-minute adaptation of William Shakespeare's  
"Agincourt" scene from the 1599 play  
*The Life of King Henry the Fifth*

**By Gary Peterson**

**SYNOPSIS:** A handful of actors attempt to put on Shakespeare's *The Life of King Henry the Fifth* with no sets, cheap props and a very limited time constraint. Nevertheless, their show turns out to be funny, earnest, and moving. Ultimately, it contains a message for today from 600 years in the past.

### **CAST OF CHARACTERS**

*(ONE MAN AND EIGHT MEN OR WOMEN)*

**CHORUS** (M OR F) ..... the Narrator (*19 lines*)  
**DIRECTOR** (M OR F) ..... the Stage Director (*23 lines*)  
**HENRY V** (M) ..... King of England (*20 lines*)  
  
**BEDFORD** (M OR F) ..... English Noble (*5 lines*)  
**EXETER** (M OR F) ..... English Noble (*7 lines*)  
**WESTMORELAND** (M OR F) ... English Noble (*4 lines*)  
  
**CONSTABLE** (M OR F) ..... French Noble (*3 lines*)  
**MONTJOY** (M OR F) ..... French Noble (*7 lines*)  
**QUARTERMASTER** (M OR F) . in charge of supplies (*4 lines*)

### **SCENE**

An empty stage, representing the field of Agincourt, France, October 25, 1415.

### **PRODUCTION NOTES**

1. Any and all roles can be played by men or women, although **KING HENRY** is certainly written for a man. A smaller cast is possible

through doubling. The **DIRECTOR** may be played by the same actor who plays the **CONSTABLE**, and the **QUARTERMASTER** may be played by the **CHORUS**.

2. The **DIRECTOR** may call **CHORUS** by the actor's actual first name, rather than Jack, if so desired.
3. The **DIRECTOR** may actually appear onstage, rather than just as a disembodied voice, if that is more practical or desirable.
4. The "Saint Crispin's Day" speech is meant to really build up in tension. **HENRY** starts low and easy, but works himself up through the speech until he is quite excited near the end, and the other Englishmen key off this enthusiasm. When they shout their "HOO-AH!" - it is genuine.
5. The weaponry and armor that the **QUARTERMASTER** delivers may be as cheesy and simple as desired. In fact, the longbows are specified as being of the children's toy variety.
6. "Cinque" is, of course, French for the number five. It is pronounced exactly like the English word "sank."

## PROPERTIES

CONSTABLE, MONTJOY:

Fake armor and rubber swords.

QUARTERMASTER:

Cart or large bag with the following, given to the Englishmen:

- Fake Leather helmet
- Fake breastplate
- Rubber sword
- 2 Children's toy bows
- 2 quivers
- 6-8 rubber suction cupped toy arrows

KING HENRY:

Sturdier, but still fake, plastic sword.

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**SETTING:** *An empty stage. At rise, the set is dark.*

**CHORUS:** O for a Muse of fire!

*Stage lights come up full and CHORUS enters. He speaks with a large voice and really hams it up.*

That would ascend  
The brightest heaven of invention,  
A kingdom for a stage, princes to act  
And monarchs to behold the swelling scene!

*A microphone key opens, and the DIRECTOR is heard over the loudspeakers:*

**DIRECTOR:** *(Cutting in.)* Sorry, Jack, we're only doing the ten-minute version today.

**CHORUS:** *(Interrupted.)* What?

**DIRECTOR:** *(Microphone key click.)* The ten-minute version, Jack.

**CHORUS:** Well, nobody told me!

**DIRECTOR:** *(Key click.)* It was in the last notice, Jack. Check your email. We're doing Speedy Shakespeare this week.

**CHORUS:** *(Unsure.)* It's still *Henry the Fifth*, right?

**DIRECTOR:** *(Key click.)* Uh, yeah! *Henry the Fifth*. *Hank Cinque*. But, as long as we're only doing the ten-minute version, we're going to be scaling back on the production in general.

**CHORUS:** *(Warily.)* Uh-huh. Scaling back, huh?

**DIRECTOR:** Well, with the time constraint, we've decided to go with a tight budget; less actors, you know, a general downsizing.

**CHORUS:** *(Looking around, finally noticing the stage is bare.)* Where's the forest set?

**DIRECTOR:** That's one of the things we've cut back on. You don't need all that scenery and stuff, getting in the way of the actors.

**CHORUS:** I see. Bare stage, huh?

**DIRECTOR:** The audience can use their imaginations.

**CHORUS:** Which cast members did you end up cutting?

**DIRECTOR:** Well . . . it might be just easier to tell you who's in it, rather than who's out. I guess we cut rather a lot.

**CHORUS:** Do tell.

**DIRECTOR:** (*He gives the actual cast members' names.*) Well, there's \_\_\_\_\_, he's playing King Henry. There's \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_. Oh, and \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ play the Frenchmen.

**CHORUS:** (*Mock.*) I didn't hear my name. Did you cut me?

**DIRECTOR:** (*Reassuringly.*) No, no. You're still in it.

**CHORUS:** And just what am I supposed to do?

**DIRECTOR:** (*Key click.*) You're the Prologue. Set the scene.

**CHORUS:** Lemme get this straight. I'm supposed to tell these people (*Gestures to the audience.*) that this simple, empty stage is some vast field in France, where one of the most important battles in European history took place, and that our seven actors represent two huge warring armies, with invisible horses and unseen cannons and who knows what; and all of this happens in a flat ten minutes?

**DIRECTOR:** (*Key click.*) You got it, Jack. In fact, you got like 30 seconds left for your prologue. Any other questions?

**CHORUS:** None. It's crystal clear. (*To audience, without great enthusiasm.*) This is France, right across the Pas de Calais from England. The year is 1415, the height of the Hundred Years' War. France and England have been fighting over this land for, well, a hundred years. Nearly. (*HENRY V enters; CHORUS points him out.*) King Henry the Fifth of England and his small army (*BEDFORD, EXETER, and WESTMORELAND enter behind, looking grim, but ready.*) - really small army - have just come from a stunning victory at the castle of Harfleur, to challenge the much larger French army (*Scoffs, as CONSTABLE and MONTJOY, representing the French army, enter from the other side.*) - which is played by TWO guys - here, at the field of Agincourt. (*Exiting, unenthusiastically.*) I hope you all like our play.

**CONSTABLE:** (*Overconfident.*) See, Montjoy? The rains have stopped; the sun shines on our armor! It turns out to be a good day after all. Let the English come. Look at their puny army! We're ready for them.

**MONTJOY:** Oui, my lord Constable. Shall I go and taunt them?

**CONSTABLE:** It's not worth the effort. After the battle, we'll gloat.  
(*They continue miming a conversation, as the dialogue picks up in the English camp.*)

**WESTMORELAND:** (*Peering over at the French army.*) There must be 60,000 men over there!

**EXETER:** (*Worried.*) That's five to one against us.

**BEDFORD:** Bad odds.

*A very fake, obviously man-made horse whinny sounds offstage on the French side.*

**MONTJOY:** Hark how our horses neigh for battle.

**CONSTABLE:** Saddle up! Let's ride! (*CONSTABLE and MONTJOY exit.*)

**WESTMORELAND:** (*Wistfully.*) If only we had some of the soldiers on rest leave back home!

**HENRY:** (*Coming up behind.*) What was that? You want more men? No you don't. We don't need them.

**BEDFORD:** (*Droll.*) Oh, boy, here comes the pep talk.

**HENRY:** That's right. Here comes the pep talk. *THE* pep talk. The one that every other motivational speech ever made harkens back to. (*Breaking the fourth wall, he speaks directly to the audience.*) Look, we're paraphrasing here, but when you go back home, I want you all to look it up and read this speech in its original language for yourself. It's easy to find. Just Google Saint Crispin's Day and it'll pop up. C-R-I-S-P-I-N Crispin; patron saint of cobblers, tanners, and leather workers. Do it. Really. (*Back in character, speaking to his men.*) First of all, if any of you don't want to be here, go home. I'll give you money for the trip. We don't want anyone here who doesn't want to be on the team. And

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this is gonna be one great team. *(Pause.)* Today is October 25<sup>th</sup>, 1415; this is Saint Crispin's Day. Any man who comes home safe from this battle will never hear this day mentioned again without a gleam in his eye and a lump in his throat. When you are old, old men, you will remember this day vividly; recalling with pride the feats, the bravery, and the camaraderie that you will show today. People on the homefront will remember your names as they remember their closest kin. *(Pretending to ponder.)* Who was there at Agincourt on Saint Crispin's Day? I know. *(Slaps himself, then each one in turn.)* Henry the King; Bedford, Exeter, Westmoreland, *(Points to unseen individuals behind the three.)* Warwick, Talbot, Salisbury, Gloucester. The story of this battle will be passed from father to son for a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand years. They will all marvel how a small, outnumbered handful fought against vast, mounted army. Those soldiers at home will be sorry they missed out on this one great team; this band of brothers who fought together as one upon Saint Crispin's Day. What say you, men?

**ALL ENGLISH SOLDIERS:** *(Crisply, as one.)* HOO-AH!

**EXETER:** Sire, I saw the French army getting ready with their war horses.

**HENRY:** We're ready, too, aren't we men? Keep your wits about you this day. *(To WESTMORELAND.)* No need for those reinforcements, right, brother?

**WESTMORELAND:** Let them sleep at home. We are plenty for this skirmish.

**HENRY:** That's the spirit! *(Yells.)* Quartermaster!

**QUARTERMASTER:** *(Enters, dressed as an English soldier, with a cart of weapons, as described below.)* Here, sir!

**HENRY:** Pass out the weaponry!

**QUARTERMASTER:** Yes, sir! *(He takes the objects out of the cart and passes them along to WESTMORELAND, barking their nomenclature, like a drill sergeant. He punches the word "one" at each occurrence.)* Standard issue English soldier personal

armament, circa 1415! *One* genuine leather helmet! *One* chainmail breastplate! *One* fire-tested steel, long handled broadsword!

**HENRY:** And the secret weapon?

**QUARTERMASTER:** Sir, yes, sir! *(To BEDFORD and EXETER.)*

Step forward archers! *(Again, barking out the items.)* *One* each: *One* sturdy yew wood, English crafted long bow! *(He hands each a child's play bow.)* *One* quiver, filled with *one* hundred aerodynamically stable, armor-piercing, hardwood arrows! *(He gives each toy arrows, equipped with rubber suction cup tips.)*

**HENRY:** Excellent! Dismissed Quartermaster!

**QUARTERMASTER:** Sir, yes, sir! *(He salutes smartly, and exits with the empty cart.)*

**HENRY:** *(To BEDFORD and EXETER.)* Gentlemen, what you are holding is our one true tactical advantage in this battle.

**BEDFORD:** The bow and arrow?

**EXETER:** That's pretty old technology.

**HENRY:** Not ours. Our bows are state of the art. Only we have them, and the enemy is unaware of their power. The English Longbow, *(Pointedly to his men.)* in the right hands, is accurate and deadly up to 200 yards. Our advantage is the long-ranged attack. They'd have to get close to us, but we don't have to get close to them. Now, look down on that field; what do you see?

**BEDFORD:** Floorboards.

**HENRY:** No. Think. The sun's out now, but it was raining all night. Look closely at the field . . . what do you see?

**EXETER:** Mud.

**HENRY:** Mud. Yes. Our friend, mud. The enemy is going to go through that field on their big war horses, each man weighed down with a hundred pounds of armor and equipment.

**EXETER:** *(Light dawning.)* They'll get bogged down.

**HENRY:** *(Agreeing, as his MEN see his plan.)* They'll get bogged down. Long enough for you and the other archers to zero in. Volley after volley you'll launch into their midst, all from up here on the high ground.

**BEDFORD:** Brilliant!

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**HENRY:** When they're softened up, (*Slaps WESTMORELAND.*)  
you'll go in there with your ground troops and finish them off. You  
got it?

**WESTMORELAND:** (*In awe of the plan.*) Aye, my liege.

**HENRY:** That's the strategy. Each man knows his part. Now  
soldiers, brethren all, let us unto the battle, and God be on our  
side!

*They exit, and CHORUS reenters.*

**CHORUS:** (*Quicker and more earnestly than his first speech:*)

And so our scene must to the battle fly;  
Where - O for pity! - we shall try to show  
With only seven vile and ragged foils,  
Right ill-disposed, in brawl ridiculous,  
The famous battle of Agincourt. Yet sit and see,  
Minding true things by what these mockeries be.

**DIRECTOR:** (*Cutting in, microphone key click.*) Ah, hold it, Jack.

**CHORUS:** (*Irritated.*) What now?

**DIRECTOR:** No battle, Jack.

**CHORUS:** What, more budget cuts?

**DIRECTOR:** We're trying for a PG rating here, Jack. No blood and  
guts.

*Some of the actors appear around the curtains with swords drawn.  
After a few moments, they all look disappointed, and begin slinking off  
discouraged.*

**CHORUS:** But the guys really practiced their swordplay and  
everything!

**DIRECTOR:** Sorry, Jack, the actual battle's out. They can talk about  
it but they can't depict it.

**CHORUS:** Oh, man!

**DIRECTOR:** Let's cut to the chase, Jack. (*Calling.*) Hank! Hank!  
Henry!

**HENRY:** (*From around curtain, with sword.*) Me?

**DIRECTOR:** Yeah. (*Directing.*) The battle's all over. You come center; you're exhausted. Put down the sword.

**HENRY:** (*Coming out.*) Can I lean on it? Like I'm war-weary from battle.

**DIRECTOR:** Hey, that's good. Use that. You've seen a lot; you've done extraordinary things today. You're war-weary. You lean on your sword for support. I like that. Everybody else is gone. (*Pointedly.*) Everybody else is gone. (*The stage empties except for HENRY, who stands center, leaning on his sword wearily.*) Now we need the French guy. Montjoy.

**MONTJOY:** (*Entering, raised hand.*) I'm here.

**DIRECTOR:** Yeah, that's it. OK, you do your last scene with the king.

**MONTJOY:** From what line?

**DIRECTOR:** Uh . . . (*We hear pages flipping.*) Here! Exeter says, "Here comes the herald of the French, my liege." Get Exeter back.

**HENRY:** He's just over there. (*Points offstage.*)

**EXETER:** You want me back?

**DIRECTOR:** Yeah. Yeah. Say, "Here comes the herald of the French, my liege."

**EXETER:** (*Out of character, lackluster.*) Here comes the herald of the French, my liege.

**DIRECTOR:** Fine, now you exit, and Montjoy comes on. (*EXETER leaves, grumbling. MONTJOY enters.*)

**HENRY:** How now! What means this, herald? Comest thou to take me hostage? Sell me for ransom?

**MONTJOY:** No, great king. I come to thee for humble charity. We want to ask a modest favor of you. Give us leave, great King, to view the field in safety and count our dead.

**HENRY:** I tell thee truly, herald, there has been so much confusion, so much bloodshed on both sides, and the tides of battle went this way and that; I'm not sure who won the day.

**MONTJOY:** The day is yours.

**HENRY:** Praised be God! Go, herald, tell your captains to search the field in peace. We will do the likewise, by your gracious leave. Should we find any of your soldiers amongst our own, we will return them to you with all honors.

**MONTJOY:** Thank you, King Henry. I take my leave. *(He exits. The set darkens.)*

**CHORUS:** *(Enters under a spotlight and addresses the audience conversationally.)* Shakespeare tells us that ten thousand Frenchmen were casualties at Agincourt, while the English army lost only 25 men and 4 nobles, who were counted separately. These numbers are all but certainly wrong, but it was a very lopsided victory for the English against the superior numbers of the French army. What happened after the battle? Henry ended up marrying the daughter of the King of France, and their son, Henry the Sixth, was crowned king of both countries. That didn't stop the Hundred Years War, though. That raged off and on until 1453, a total of 116 years for those of you counting. And yet now, today, England and France are the staunchest of allies. They trade with each other freely, and neither of them would think of fighting the other. The strength of their ongoing friendship is proven time and time again. Right up the coast from where this battle took place lays the region of Normandy. My just mentioning that might put you in mind of a date in 1944 when the British, along with the Americans and the Canadians, proved their loyalty by storming those Normandy beaches and beginning the liberation of France from the Nazis. The many men who gallantly fought there hope that you remember D-Day, June 6<sup>th</sup>, as a means of honoring them. Those few, who fought here, 600 years ago at Agincourt, hope that you will remember Saint Crispin's Day.

**THE END**