

# CREATIVE ARTS learning springboards

## Shakespeare's plants and the images they paint through metaphors

### King Henry V wins the famous Battle of Agincourt

**Aim:** Understanding Shakespeare's metaphors by recognising the flowers and weeds he uses to paint a political picture.

In this passage from Henry V, the Duke of Burgundy (a French lord) begs Henry V for a peaceful settlement after the great English victory at Agincourt (1415), to restore France to her former glory. He paints a picture of dying plants and weeds overgrowing the land that was once thriving and fertile. He talks directly about the French countryside, but can you sense any underlying meaning?

*Her vine, the merry cheerer of the heart,  
Unpruned dies; her hedges even-pleach'd,  
Like prisoners wildly overgrown with hair,  
Put forth disorder'd twigs; her fallow leas  
The darnel, hemlock and rank fumitory  
Doth root upon, while that the coulter rusts  
That should deracinate such savagery;  
The even mead, that erst brought sweetly forth  
The freckled cowslip, burnet and green clover,  
Wanting the scythe, all uncorrected, rank,  
Conceives by idleness and nothing teems  
But hateful docks, rough thistles, kecksies, burs...*



### Activities:

The Duke of Burgundy's Plants

- Explore/identify each plant named and describe it or draw it.
- Research the Battle of Agincourt (1415) – you could watch the battle scene in Henry V, The Hollow Crown (2012) with Tom Hiddleston as the King, or Kenneth Branagh's famous version of the film (1989).
- Take three of the named plants and use each one to describe a characteristic of a person (look at Act 5 Scene 1 of A Midsummer Night's Dream where Flute (playing Thisbe) talks about Pyramus' 'yellow cowslip cheeks'. What do you think those cheeks looked like based on the description of cowslips in this passage from Henry V?
- Why might France's 'vine' (the 'Her' that starts this passage refers to France) be 'the merry cheerer of the heart'?

### Resources:

- Pappus plant fact sheets.
- Plant reference books or internet

### Key vocabulary:

Even-pleached – neatly-woven (with hazel branches)

Fallow leas – barren fields

Coulter – metal spur on plough

Deracinate – rip up by the roots

Wanting the scythe – lacking the scythe

### Success criteria:

- ✓ I can use plants and weeds as a metaphor to describe a characteristic of a person.
- ✓ I can explain the subtext of Shakespeare's metaphors because I know about flowers and weeds.