

Writing about *King Richard III*

Essay question

How does Shakespeare present Richard's tormented thought processes and what does this show about character, thematic concerns and dramatic form?

Act 5 Scene 3, lines 180–209

The Ghosts vanish. KING RICHARD III starts out of his dream.

KING RICHARD III	<p>Give me another horse: bind up my wounds. Have mercy, Jesu!--Soft! I did but dream. O coward conscience, how dost thou afflict me! The lights burn blue. It is now dead midnight. Cold fearful drops stand on my trembling flesh. What do I fear? Myself? There's none else by: Richard loves Richard; that is, I am I. Is there a murderer here? No. Yes, I am: Then fly. What, from myself? Great reason why: Lest I revenge. What, myself upon myself? Alack. I love myself. Wherefore? For any good That I myself have done unto myself? O, no! Alas, I rather hate myself For hateful deeds committed by myself! I am a villain: yet I lie. I am not. Fool, of thyself speak well: fool, do not flatter. My conscience hath a thousand several tongues, And every tongue brings in a several tale, And every tale condemns me for a villain. Perjury, perjury, in the high'st degree Murder, stem murder, in the direst degree; All several sins, all used in each degree, Throng to the bar, crying all, Guilty! guilty! I shall despair. There is no creature loves me; And if I die, no soul shall pity me: Nay, wherefore should they, since that I myself Find in myself no pity to myself? Methought the souls of all that I had murder'd Came to my tent; and every one did threat To-morrow's vengeance on the head of Richard.</p>
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Plan your essay

Work with the extract above and complete the table below as you explore your ideas.

Remember as you write that your understanding of dramatic method and literary form is important in your exploration of particular characters and themes. Try to analyse the dramatic qualities of this play and the ways in which Shakespeare crafted the stories and characters you will discuss in your essay.

<p>What is your interpretation of this part of the play?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is happening here and how does this relate to the rest of the play? • What does it show about Richard's state of mind? 	
<p>What strikes you about Shakespeare's language?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What vivid images or descriptions are used in this passage? • How does Richard's language reveal his feelings and impact the audience? <p>E.G: Alas, I rather hate myself For hateful deeds committed by myself! I am a villain: yet I lie. I am not. Fool, of thyself speak well: fool, do not flatter. My conscience hath a thousand several tongues, And every tongue brings in a several tale, And every tale condemns me for a villain.</p>	
<p>What strikes you about Shakespeare's dramatic craft?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How might this scene be portrayed on stage? • What actions, tone of voice or gestures might be implied in the language Richard uses? • What might an audience be thinking or feeling as a result Shakespeare's dramatic craft? <p>E.G: And if I die, no soul shall pity me: Nay, wherefore should they, since that I myself Find in myself no pity to myself?</p>	
<p>How does this passage compare to other parts of the play?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What has happened throughout the play to bring Richard to this point of self-accusation and despair? 	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you describe the way Shakespeare provides a dramatic experience for the audience as well as a representation of madness? 	
<p>How does your interpretation compare with other interpretations?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What alternative interpretations of this play have you encountered? • What critical opinions or performances (stage or screen) have you agreed with or disagreed with? • Remember to evaluate other interpretations by incorporating them into your discussion. 	

You will now have some concrete ideas that you can include in your essay. You might like to reorganise your ideas or add in other examples from the play to make a clearer plan. Use mind maps, bullet points or flow charts with words, images, sentences, thought bubbles and prompts that are intelligible to you. If you plan your essay or argument thoughtfully in detail before you begin writing, you will find that your ideas will be easier to structure and develop later.

Structure your essay

You will need to follow certain rules to give your writing a clear structure. Your essay should have:

- an **introduction** (with a clear sense of the direction in which your argument will go)
- a **main body** to develop your argument (with each paragraph making a point of dramatic or thematic significance, and referring in close detail to the script)
- a **conclusion** (that declares where your argument has arrived).

Write carefully

Your aim is to write clearly and concisely in the present tense and with sentences that are carefully punctuated. Remember to be specific in the points that you make about the play and the references you use from it, and in how you address the key points of the essay question.

Remember Shakespeare's skill as a playwright and poet

Shakespeare made specific choices about language and the dramatic representation of character, plot and theme on stage. Remember to identify some of the literary devices and dramatic techniques that he has used and explain their effectiveness. A good way to remember to do this is to make sure that you mention Shakespeare's name in every paragraph as you comment on the techniques that he is using.

Remember to use quotations and include analysis of the script

You will want to be a thoughtful reader of *King Richard III* so that you can explore the implications of words and ideas in the script. Your analysis should show that you are aware of metaphors, similes and other literary features, and that you consider the implications of genre, audience and context. Your close analysis of words and phrases from the script must be connected to the big issues raised by the play. Try to think in terms of relating your detailed analysis to the major ideas that the play explores.

Learn from others

Although you should endeavour to be as original as possible, your critical voice is inevitably going to be strongly influenced by others: your teacher, other members of your class and film versions, as well as the views of actors and critics. Learning from others adds to the effectiveness of your argument, it does not dilute it: but remember to give credit where it is due.