

Choose a play in which a central character is in conflict with or rejects another character

Richard II is one of Shakespeare's classic works and features a central character who is in **conflict** with another character. Richard is in **conflict** with his cousin Bolingbroke. This **conflict** begins when their uncle Woodstock dies and Bolingbroke accuses Mowbray of treason. The **conflict** continues as Richard banishes Bolingbroke and then confiscates his inheritance. This act then provides the impetus for Bolingbroke to rebel and ultimately leads to him becoming King. Throughout this **conflict** Shakespeare forces the audience to consider what makes a bad ruler, and the problems with overthrowing those in charge.

In the opening scene we see that Richard is an ineffective ruler and we already begin to see **tension** between him and Bolingbroke. Richard has a childish nature and is incredibly self-centered. He doesn't seem to be taking Bolingbroke and Mowbray's accusations seriously, instead preferring to try make the court laugh with witty epigrams: "Forget, forgive; conclude and be agreed; Our doctors say this is no month to bleed." Unlike the rest of the family, Richard doesn't seem to be mourning the death of his uncle at all. Richard is unable to remain objective as he shows clear bias by favouring Mowbray and speaking down towards Bolingbroke with condescending remarks such as "How high a pitch his resolution soars!" In many productions of Richard II they cast a tall actor, such as David Tennant, so Richard can literally look down on everybody else. As well as illustrating Richard's poor leadership and bias, this line could also be hinting that Bolingbroke desired to **usurp** Richard from the beginning. Before the duel in scene 3 Bolingbroke again makes remarks that could have connotations of his aspirations: "lift me up / To reach at victory above my head". This could be alluding to Bolingbroke's desire to take the crown. Richard eventually stops the duel and rather than let them fight to the death, he banishes them both from England. Rather than seeming particularly angry at Richard in that moment, Bolingbroke takes a moment to admire the power that a King has as he seems almost in awe, and perhaps envious, when he says "Four lagging winters and four wanton springs / End in a word: such is the breath of kings."

In Act 2 Scene 1, Richard makes his **main** mistake in the way he handles the death of John of Gaunt, Bolingbroke's father. Richard spares few words upon Gaunt's death and immediately confiscates his possessions and land to fund his own Irish wars. The Duke of York warns Richard that by doing this he is taking what is rightfully Bolingbroke's inheritance and reminds him that without these laws of succession that Richard is breaking, he himself wouldn't have become King: "Be not thyself; for how art thou a king / But by fair sequence and succession?" Richard ignores York's warning that this act would weaken his position as King and goes on to take all that should belong to Bolingbroke. Upon Richard's exit, Northumberland –an ally of Bolingbroke– and other lords discuss how Richard is destroying England by over-taxing the people to benefit himself and make plans to depose Richard: "If then we shall shake off our slavish yoke...And make high majesty look like itself". This shows that even though Richard believes himself to be anointed by God, his biggest mistake was thinking that he could act exactly as he wanted with no repercussions.

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Comment [1]: This is a good introduction which breaks down the task into three parts. This is the first part.

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Comment [2]: This is the second part.

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Comment [3]: This is then the third part.

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Comment [4]: This essay also claims it will go further and bring in this theme – this is the 'how it affects your understanding of the play as a whole' part of the question.

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Comment [5]: Here we see that this paragraph and section of the essay is clearly focused on the question.

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Comment [6]: A well selected quote for the purposes of this essay.

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Comment [7]: And here the essay analyses more than just plot and dialogue, but mentions features of stage craft.

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Comment [8]: A strong feature of this essay is it's ability to deal with the ambiguity in the character of Bolingbroke. This is one of the more difficult parts of the play so dealing with it well will make for an impressive essay.

Kirkwall Grammar School 2/5/2017 11:54

Comment [9]: Another well chosen quote for the purpose of this essay. Although this essay has not gone in to great depth with the opening scenes the candidate's ability to pick out pithy quotes and show clearly how they relate to the issues in the question allow us to judge that they must know the text very well.

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Comment [10]: Because of the clarity in the introduction we know we have moved on to the second part of the essay, and understand that this is key to the **conflict** because it provides the reason for Bolingbroke's rebellion.

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Comment [11]: Here the candidate shows they are still focusing on the **conflict** between Richard and Bolingbroke, although Bolingbroke does not appear in this scene.

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Comment [12]: Here we have a nice comment relating all this to the theme of the play – how should you rule, and what are the difficulties of wielding power?

Act 3 begins outside Bristol castle as Bolingbroke apprehends Bushy and Green, flatterers of Richard. He accuses them of having “misled a prince” and recites a list of charges against them which includes blaming their advice for making Richard “misinterpret” and subsequently banish him. Bolingbroke is clearly angry at Bushy and Green for leading Richard astray and condemns them to be executed. Bolingbroke does all this in the name of the King and continues to speak of Richard only in terms of respect: “... a royal king, / A happy gentlemen in blood and lineaments”. Bolingbroke implies that Richard is actually a good King and he is attempting to protect him by disposing of his corrupt advisors. However, with these actions he is stepping far beyond his position. Bolingbroke has no right to decide who deserves execution and while he seems to believe he is doing this for Richard, it is more like he is taking on Richard’s role as King. It is difficult to believe at this point that Bolingbroke really didn’t have any plan to take the throne for himself.

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Comment [13]: Here the candidate has done well to explain how this section of the play furthers the **conflict** between the two main characters through their actions on other characters.

By Act 4 Bolingbroke is officially the King of England as Richard agreed to step down for Bolingbroke, despite Bolingbroke never explicitly stating his desires. The first time we see him in Westminster Hall however he seems to have trouble ruling his court. Bolingbroke’s enquiries into the details of Woodstock’s death leads to a series of challenges as the noblemen present begin to argue fiercely over Aumerle’s innocence. Bolingbroke struggles to assert authority as the nobles throw down their gages left and right. Thus, Bolingbroke’s conflict with Richard shows us that by overthrowing a ruler, Bolingbroke has unintentionally undermined his own position.

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Comment [14]: This is excellent. Here the essay sees with some degree of insight the issues at work in the play. Bolingbroke is both saying Richard is a good king but challenging his position. This ambiguity in his character is what makes the play difficult, and this essay deals with this succinctly which is a feature of a very good essay.

This **conflict** between Richard and Bolingbroke eventually leads to Richard’s death. Exton kills Richard in his prison in Pomfret Castle as he believes that will win Bolingbroke’s favour. Upon hearing of Richard’s death, Bolingbroke denies that he ordered it though Exton tells the King that the order came “from [his] own mouth”. Though it is ambiguous whether Bolingbroke hinted that he wanted one of his men to kill Richard, he does admit that part of him is glad that he is dead: “...though I did wish him dead, I hate the murderer, love him murdered.” King Henry then banishes Exton from England and orders him never to return. This scene could have parallels with the opening scene as King Henry is banishing someone involved in a family death that he likely played some part in. This is therefore comparable to the beginning of the play when Richard banished Mowbray and Bolingbroke as they accused each other of causing the death of Woodstock, which Richard himself is thought to have orchestrated. Richard’s death also links with Act 3 Scene 4 where the gardeners talk about what makes a good king in the form of a gardening metaphor. Shakespeare implies that the state of England under Richard was like an untended garden full of weeds. A good king must “cut of the heads of too fast growing sprays” and make sure the land is properly “trimm’d and dress’d”. Therefore, the gardeners would agree that killing Richard was the right thing to do but clearly it wasn’t easy for Bolingbroke as he decides he must travel to the Holy Lands, “...To wash this blood off from my guilty hand”. Now Bolingbroke is King Henry he begins to learn that the decision that gets the best results for him aren’t always the easiest and that power and leadership can lead to weighty consequences and regrets.

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Comment [15]: Here, just as the introduction stated we move on to the theme – how the **conflict** and Bolingbroke’s usurpation cause problems, highlighting the theme.

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Comment [16]: Again the essay deals very well with the difficulties inherent in the character of Bolingbroke. Here – did he order Richard’s death – does it matter?

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Comment [17]: This shows a depth of understanding. The play has a cyclical structure where Bolingbroke finds himself in much the same position as Richard was at the beginning.

In conclusion, Richard and Bolingbroke’s conflict develops throughout the play as Richard makes more and more mistakes as King. After Richard banishes Bolingbroke, he takes all of Gaunt’s land and possessions which are rightfully Bolingbroke’s inheritance and in doing so breaks the laws of succession which brought him to the throne. This weakens his position as King and eventually

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Comment [18]: Very good on what Shakespeare (maybe) saying about the nature of Kingship. It requires someone who can be brutal but also has a human side. Too Brutal and they’ll become a tyrant, too self assured and they’ll become vain (like Richard), but too human and they’ll not be able to take the difficult measures necessary.

Bolingbroke usurps him and takes the throne, which arguably he always had desires to do so. Once officially King, Bolingbroke realises that keeping control and the responsibility of power is more difficult to handle than he originally thought and by overthrowing Richard he undermined his own position. Shakespeare seems to present the message that the responsibility of a King is to rid the land of the "noisome weeds, which without profit suck the soil's fertility from wholesome flowers."

20/20 an excellent piece of work.

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Comment [19]: A very good conclusion. Restates the main points of the essay. Is written in very good flowing prose and ends on a stylish quote.