

Choose from a play a key scene in which a troubled character reaches a crisis point.

Show how the scene reveals a crisis point and discuss how it adds to your understanding of the character and/or theme in the play as a whole.

“Lets talk of graves, of worms, of epitaphs”

In Act 3 Sc. 2 of William Shakespeare’s Richard II the troubled character of King Richard reaches a **crisis point** as his nation deserts him and he begins to realise that Bolingbroke has usurped his royal rule. The Scene is important for a number of reasons, but it chiefly adds to our understanding of Richard; how he believes himself to be infallible and answerable only to god; how he loves the ceremony of kingship more than that actual rule; and how he is completely self involved. It also shows this crisis in his character through some of the most famous and exquisite language to be found anywhere in Shakespeare.

At this point in the play Richard has returned from Ireland and receives a succession of bad news which shatter his confidence. To begin with we are introduced to the supremely confident Richard as he asks the land and animals of England to rise up and defend him from his enemies: “Yield stinging nettles to mine enemies... guard it, I pray thee, with a lurking adder.” This shows us a side of Richard we know well, he believes he has been anointed by God to rule over England and can do no wrong. More than that, he believes all his wants and desires are divine, so all of nature will rise up to protect him. This clearly adds to what we know of Richard previously. *He thought only of his uncle Gaunt’s death as a financial boom to himself. He believed a little quip and word play could settle the arguing Mowbray and Bolingbroke in Sc.1*, and he now thinks, although he must have heard of the rebellion, that the very plants of England will come to his aid. Richard is clearly a character struggling to distinguish between fantasy and reality as he notes: ‘not all the water in the rough rude sea can wash the balm off rom an anointed king’.

Next we see how Richard turns to constructing elaborate and sophisticated metaphors and poetry, rather than face up to harsh realities of governing. He describes himself as the sun that has returned to England and as it cast down it’s rays all the ‘thieves and murderers’ will retreat in to their ‘guilt holes’. As though at the simple sight of him Bolingbroke will give in. Here Shakespeare still has Richard speaking in complete lines consisting of complex sentences and polysyllabic words to highlight Richard’s love of verbosity.

Tom Groat 20/4/2017 20:10

Comment [1]:
Clearly defines what the question asks for. Now the essay can refer back to this, or part of it, and still answer the question.

Tom Groat 20/4/2017 20:14

Comment [2]:
This is the second part of the question, how it adds to your understanding of the character. This gives three reasons that the scene helps us understand Richard.

Tom Groat 20/4/2017 20:15

Comment [3]:
A brief summary of the scene taken from the notes on the left hand page of the play.

Tom Groat 20/4/2017 21:10

Comment [4]:
This ties back to the first feature of the character of Richard that was mentioned in the introduction.

Tom Groat 20/4/2017 21:11

Comment [5]:
This is the key to writing ‘Key Scene’ Essay - to relate the important parts of the scene to the rest of the play.

Tom Groat 20/4/2017 21:13

Comment [6]:
Here again the essay refers back to the introduction, and how Richard believes himself to be infallible, which in turn is answering the ‘adds to your understanding of the character’ part of the question.

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Comment [7]:
This is the second part of ‘add to your understanding of the character’ - the love of ceremony rather than the difficulties of ruling.

Tom Groat 20/4/2017 21:16

Comment [8]:
This is important to how the climax, the crisis moment works - We know Richard reaches a breakdown because his most striking feature, his command of language breaks down, in order to make that point later it needs to be pointed out that here he is still in control.

As Richard begins to hear more news of the rebellion he starts to swing between fantastical hope and despair, shocked by the desertion of his Welsh army, only then to state: 'Is the king's name not worth twenty thousand names?' This could be the first hint of the insanity or fantasy that takes over Richard towards the end of the play, *when captive in the dungeon of Pomfret Castle he complains of music he thinks he can hear, depending on the production we are to assume this music is real, but maybe inside Richard's head*. Indeed this is the first time Richard might be considering who he is with out the crown - a question he is unable to answer.

Next Richard receives more bad news from Scroop, as to how all the nation has joined with Bolingbroke. Here we see the vengeful and angry side of Richard, as he rages against Bushy and Green, who he is quick to label 'Judas's and 'Snakes in my heart-blood warmed.' As an audience we clearly see the *dramatic irony* here - Bushy and Green were executed in the previous scene, Richard's temper is in full flight though. *This builds on the impression we had of him in Sc.1 when, unable to make Bolingbroke and Mowbray relent he through a petulant tantrum crying out 'We were not born to sue, but to command!' Or his threat to John of Gaunt to 'run thy head from thy unreverent shoulders.'* Because Richard is a childish man he is prone to these harsh fits of anger.

When Scroop reveals that both Richard's flatterers are dead we see another side to the King. He moves from being full of fantasy or hot rage to one of reflection and deep sorrow. However this is the same Richard. The **crisis** has come and he is beginning to realise he will loose his crown, but he still cannot think beyond how events impact on him, before he constructed great 60 word extended metaphors to highlight his power, now he does the same to chronicle his sorrow. In one of the most powerful and famous speeches Richard gives glimpses of humility as says: 'For God sake let us sit on the ground and tell sad stories of the death of kings.' In most productions Richard is one of the tallest actors (such as the RSC / David Tennant version) so to see him brought low and physically sitting on the sand is a dramatic moment. In the Mark Rylance production they incorporate some humour at this moment. Richard, clearly unsure what to do looks around at the other actors almost as if they might begin the story telling. Rylance them furthers this by pulling a shocked face at the line 'some poisoned by their wives', however Shakespeare reminds us that Richard is still in control as he is able to construct a powerful image of the crown as a castle where Death reigns and the 'antic sits' and although the

Tom Groat 20/4/2017 21:18

Comment [9]:

This is not mentioned in the introduction, but it still clearly linking the scene, and the crisis that Richard is experiencing to how he is elsewhere in the play.

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Comment [10]:

This essay just follows the main events of the scene through one at a time. They are all summarised on the left hand page of the play.

Tom Groat 20/4/2017 21:21

Comment [11]:

Again, this was not mentioned in the introduction, and the essay would be improved if it was, but there is no doubt it is doing what the essay asked - it is showing how the scene highlights features of Richard's personality and then how they are also seen elsewhere.

Tom Groat 20/4/2017 21:22

Comment [12]:

This is worth mentioning, to make sure the essay doesn't just become a list of quotes and explanations, a drama essay should attempt to analyse other features and techniques.

Tom Groat 20/4/2017 21:24

Comment [13]:

Shows good knowledge of the text as a whole as it refers to two other examples of this feature of Richard's character.

Tom Groat 20/4/2017 21:25

Comment [14]:

This is the essay moving to the 'self involvement' that was the last feature of Richard's character that was listed. Also it shows a degree of insight to note that there isa change - Richard's circumstances are altered, but we still see the man underneath.

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Comment [15]:

It's always worth praising the text's you're writing on. This play contains two of the most famous speeches in Shakespeare's histories - John of Gaunt's 'This England' speech and here Richards lament.

Tom Groat 20/4/2017 21:29

Comment [16]:

Here the essay deals with how different productions stage this part of the scene. This scene does not offer as much to discuss as other scenes (Act 1 Sc1, or the Act 2 Sc1 tend to be more varied in different productions) but this ticks the box to show that the essay analyses more than just quoting the dialogue.

king is given a chance to play at 'monarchizing' at any moment 'a little pin bores through the castle wall and farewell king'.

This, the thought of who he is without the crown, is too much for Richard and he reaches his most emotional point, when even his language deserts him, he fully breaks down, spouting monosyllabic phrases of grief: "feel want, taste grief, need friends" this is in complete contrast to who Richard was earlier with his great speeches, or who he will be again (*his ability with words will return in Act 4 when he memorably compares himself and Bolingbroke to buckets in a well, or in his final scene when he states how he "My brain I'll prove female to my soul" and he can populate his dungeon with his thoughts*). Here, however we see a true **crisis** and for perhaps the only time in the play Richard admits he is the same as other men.

Although the others try to rally Richard, he is still dejected and concludes the scene by reversing his earlier metaphor (perhaps showing his lyrical ability returning) as he states "Richard's night to Bolingbroke's fair day" showing he has come to realise the nettles and vipers of England will not come to his rescue and that Bolingbroke is now the centre of the action.

In conclusion Act 3 Sc.2 proves a **crisis** point for the character of Richard. He comes to realise he may not be protected by god, and despite his wonder with language he may not be cut out as an effective ruler. Shakespeare manages to do this with extraordinary skill, takes us from the start of the scene, when the audience have contempt for Richard to a state of great pity for the fallen king, after he receives the news of the rebellion. It is significant throughout this that Richards character does not really change - if anything the altered circumstances reveal more about his fundamental character trait; reflective egotism. However as he muses on death we can relate to him and due to the beauty of Shakespeare's language we enwrapped as he 'tells sad stories of the death of kings.'

Overall

This does exactly what a key scene essay should do. It picks out the main features of the scene - tells us what this shows about the characters and then where and when we see the same (or contrasting) behaviour in the rest of the text. Thus it can show a depth of knowledge over the whole play.

It has a good deal of insight in terms of what is happening - the gradual revelations building up to Richard's complete breakdown. It notes that his self pity is actually part of his egotism, and the same thing that drives him to be selfish and maniacal elsewhere in the play (though this fact could be more

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Comment [17]:

If you are able to learn and recite large parts of the text then brilliant and feel free to include several lines at once, if not then this is a good example of how to use a few short phrases and still make the same point.

Tom Groat 20/4/2017 21:34

Comment [18]:

This is why the essay had to go in to some detail regarding the speech earlier, so it could highlight the contrast with this section.

Tom Groat 20/4/2017 21:36

Comment [19]:

As stated before, this essay just moves through the key scene in order making comments on the important parts, and explaining how they highlight the key features of Richard that we see elsewhere in the play.

Tom Groat 20/4/2017 21:38

Comment [20]:

Although not explicit this is attempting to answer the 'theme of the play as a whole' part of the Question, which so far has been left (not that that's essentially wrong as the question states you can write 'and/or' on this or character. In terms of theme this relate to Shakespeare's purpose in showing his audience how Richard is a bad king, but also asking us to question if that makes it right to remove him - we are clearly supposed to feel for Richard after he gives up, and in the second half of the play he is truly tragic character.

Tom Groat 20/4/2017 21:41

Comment [21]:

a stylish flourish, and by no means necessary, but it is considered good form if you can end your essay on a quote. If this quote can be worked in to the introduction it will give you essay a good sense of completion. Or you can then go back and add the quote as a mini title (though in this essay I've used another as it seemed more appropriate as an opener).

explicit). It analyses several features of the play - dialogue, stagecraft, and compares different productions.

It's introduction does a good job of defining how the scene answers the question, and although once or twice it moves away from what it stated it would do, it never actually drops away from what the question asks.

It could be improved - it could quote more, there is room to analyse the language of this scene in more depth (there's a sextain - half a sonnet - hidden in the middle of it, and theres more that Richard does as he plays with various meanings of words) but it does enough.

This essay fits all the criteria for the top category of essays and would get a 19/20.