

RICHARD III Revision Questions

Act I Scene 1

1. The play starts with a soliloquy. What are the advantages of this ? What do we learn of Richard himself from this and what does his speech tell us about the current situation ?
2. Richard is essentially an actor, a performer. When Clarence and Brakenbury enter, what part is he performing ? Once they have both left the stage (ll. 117) why does he take care to let us know that ' I will shortly send thy soul to heaven' ? What other examples can you find, elsewhere in the play, of Richard announcing his intentions to the audience ?

Act 1 Scene 2

1. The scene opens with another long speech, but in a very different vein from the previous one. What is Anne's mood and whom is it principally focused on ? In view of what happens later, why is this ironic ?
2. We watch the confrontation between Richard and Anne. What surprising features does this have ? In view of what Richard has said about himself earlier, is this essentially a comic scene ? How appropriate do you find comedy at this point ? Consider what else is on the stage while this encounter is going on.
3. Why, when Richard gives Lady Anne the chance to kill him, does she not do so ? How do you account for his success with her ?

Act 1 Scene 3

1. In ll. 1 – 40 Shakespeare establishes a particular atmosphere at the start of the scene. How would you characterize this ?
2. 'Small joy have I in being England's queen' (l. 109) What reasons has Elizabeth for saying this ?
3. Why does Shakespeare, going against historical fact, bring Queen Margaret into the play ? What effect is produced by having her lurking in the background, unseen by the other characters, until l. 156 – 'Hear me, you wrangling pirates' ? Why does she call them ' pirates' ?
4. What is the dramatic impact of Margaret's various curses in this scene and why is the dialogue between her and Buckingham (ll. 280 – 303) worthy of note ?

5. What is important about Richard's short soliloquy in ll. 324-338 ?

Act I Scene 4

1. Shakespeare makes Clarence's account of his dream into one of the play's more selfconsciously poetic passages. What effect does this have on the audience and how does it influence the way we see Clarence ? Are ll.44 – 63 meant to suggest that he has in some way deserved the death which we know is being prepared for him ?

2. While Clarence is asleep, Brakenbury makes a moralizing little speech in ll.76 – 83. How would you summarize its essential message and does this have a wider relevance to events in the play as a whole ?

3. Ll. 99 – 146 constitute one of the play's only passages of prose. Why do the murderers not speak in verse at this point ?

4. How does Clarence try to persuade the murderers not to kill him ?

5. As elsewhere in the play, there is frequent reference here to God. What other examples can you find of other characters referring to God, Heaven, divine justice, heaven's decrees &c ?

6. What is the difference in attitude between the First and Second Murderer ?

ACT II Scene 1

1. What is the 'good day's work' Edward prides himself on having done ?

2. In the context of what we already know about the ambitious English nobility fighting for the crown, what is strange or unusual about the opening section of this scene (ll. 1 – 45) ?

3. Considering what happens later in the play, what do you find ironic about Buckingham's speech in ll. 33 – 40 ?

4. How does Richard's entrance change the atmosphere of the scene ? Is his attempt at reconciliation genuine ? How does he go on to stage-manage the situation to his advantage ?

Act II Scene 2

1. The scene opens with the Duchess of York talking to two of Clarence's children. What use does Shakespeare make of children in the play as a whole ?

2. In ll.72-78 Shakespeare uses a dramatic device borrowed from Greek tragedy (via Latin plays written by the Roman poet Seneca, which were widely admired in Elizabethan times) and known as 'stichomythia'. What does this involve and why do you think Shakespeare found it effective ? Where else in the play is it used ?

3. Why is Rivers suspicious of Richard and Buckingham ?
4. What might make us – the audience – doubtful of Richard's sincerity in his speech to Buckingham at the close of this scene ?

Act II Scene 3

1. In this play almost all the characters are either royal or aristocratic (or both, indeed) Why does Shakespeare devote a whole scene to a conversation between unnamed ' citizens' ?
2. The Third Citizen takes a consistent view of events. What is his recommendation, and would certain more important characters in the play have done well to take it seriously ?

Act II Scene 4

1. Together with the previous scene, this one contains no appearance by Richard. What are the practical and dramatic reasons for this ?
2. What is the atmosphere at the start of the scene and how does it change with the arrival of the Messenger ?
3. How would you summarize the Duchess of York's speech in ll. 58-68 ?

ACT III Scene 1

1. Prince Edward, eldest son of Edward IV, is now expected to be King of England as Edward V. People in Shakespeare's time attached great importance to a male heir to the throne. If he was intelligent, showed promise as a soldier and took his duties seriously, he was referred to as ' a hopeful prince' ['hopeful' in this sense meaning 'somebody who embodies the hopes of the nation'] What signs of being ' a hopeful prince' does Edward show in this scene ? How concerned is Richard regarding him ?
2. Richard compares himself (l. 82) to 'the formal Vice Iniquity'. This is a reference to an older kind of drama, known as a morality play, in which some of the characters were personified abstracts, virtues and vices (i.e. good and bad qualities) What is 'iniquity' and what do Richard's asides, here and in ll. 79 and 94, tell us about his relationship with the audience ?
3. What does the Duke of York contribute to this scene ?
4. How does Shakespeare suggest that Buckingham is getting just a little too self-confident in his role as Richard's right-hand man ?

Act III Scene 2

1. The events leading to Hastings's fall have been set in train during the previous scene. Why is he unconcerned by the Messenger's report of Lord Stanley's dream ?
2. Why does Hastings not support Richard's bid for the crown ?
3. What is the point of introducing the Pursuivant [pronounced 'percy-v'nt, by the way] and the Priest in ll. 95-112 ?

Act III Scene 3

1. Rivers, Vaughan and Grey are the latest casualties of Richard's evil strategy for seizing the throne. How does this scene fulfil part of Queen Margaret's curse ?
2. The little scene is a good illustration of Shakespeare's attention to dramatic detail. How do Ratcliffe's lines contrast in style with those of the three men going to execution ?

Act III Scene 4

1. What is Hastings's mood at the start of the scene ?
2. Why does Richard send the Bishop of Ely to ask for strawberries ?
3. When Richard re-enters (l. 58) which earlier scene does his behaviour remind us of ?
4. How would you interpret ll. 95-6 in the light of what has just happened ?

Act III Scene 5

1. Why does Richard need the support of the Lord Mayor and the citizens ?
2. What is Buckingham's role in this scene ?

Act III Scene 6

1. Why do you think Shakespeare put this brief scene into the play ?

Act III Scene 7

1. Buckingham seems at this point to take over from Richard as mastermind of the various operations to make him king. Why are the citizens resistant and how is Buckingham going to deal with this ?
2. Read Buckingham's speech in ll.116-139. What does he seem to be trying to do and what effect is he actually attempting to produce ?

3. What image of himself does Richard seek to project in ll. 140-172 ?
4. What is the point of the two bishops ?

ACT IV Scene 1

1. Who are 'my niece Plantagenet' and 'her kind aunt of Gloucester' ? Whom are they expecting to meet at the Tower of London ?
2. This is the third time Brakenbury has appeared. How consistent is his behaviour here with Shakespeare's earlier presentation of him ?
3. What are we to make of Lord Stanley ? How do we explain his abruptness in commanding Lady Anne to attend the coronation and his eagerness to hurry Dorset to safety overseas ?
4. What effect do you think Shakespeare is trying to produce in the final section of the scene, following Anne's speech (ll.66-87) ?

Act IV Scene 2

1. Why should Richard be anxious to obtain Buckingham's consent to the murder of the two princes (Edward V and the Duke of York) ?
2. Despite the fact that Richard now turns against Buckingham, he uses several positive adjectives to describe him here. Which are they and how has Buckingham demonstrated such qualities to us in earlier scenes ?
3. How do you interpret ll. 64 – 'But I am in' – 66 ? How might these lines, interestingly foreshadowing a similar passage in 'Macbeth', suggest that we are nearing the play's final phase ?

Act IV Scene 3

1. What does Tyrell's opening speech contribute to the play ? Why did Shakespeare opt for this kind of report, rather than writing a murder scene for the two princes, similar to the Clarence episode in Act I ?
2. Why is Richard going as ' a jolly thriving wooer' to Princess Elizabeth ?
[The daughter of his brother, the late King Edward IV, she does not appear in the play]

Act IV Scene 4

1. Margaret's opening speech features theatrical imagery. Where else in the play have characters made similar self-consciously theatrical references ?
2. What do Margaret's speeches in ll.45-58 and ll.61-78 tell us about her overall attitude to the unfolding horror brought about by the fulfilment of her

original curses ? Should we applaud her sense of justice achieved through revenge or see her as essentially no better, morally, than those she mocks or condemns ?

3. What ironic relevance to the next section of the scene is there in ll.126-135 ?
4. The enormous exchange between Richard and Elizabeth in ll.197-435 is the longest passage of dialogue between two characters in any Shakespeare play. Is it possible to admire Richard's achievement by the end of it ? How exactly has he managed to persuade Elizabeth so successfully ?
5. What is the impact on us of all the various messengers arriving so suddenly ?

ACT V Scene 1

1. Can we form any kind of positive estimate of Buckingham from this scene ?
2. 'That high All-Seer which I dallied with' – whom is he talking about and how exactly has he 'dallied' ? Does he deserve his fate ?

Act V Scene 2

1. This scene introduces us to Henry, Earl of Richmond. What impression does his opening speech make on us ?

Act V Scene 3

1. What dramatic advantage is gained by having both camps, Richard's and Richmond's, on stage simultaneously ?
2. How characteristic do you find Stanley's speech in ll. 87-105 ?
3. Why did Shakespeare introduce the ghosts in this scene ? Are they necessary or could we have made do with Richard's speech in ll.180-209 ?
4. What differences do you note between the two leaders' addresses to their troops ?

Act V Scene 4

1. Shakespeare creates stage battles with the help of short scenes. What do you think would have been the advantage, in his theatre (not the Globe, at this point, but an earlier playhouse) – without lighting, curtain, sound effects { except v. basic ones & music} – of keeping the scenes short ?
2. This scene contains the play's most famous line. Which one is it and why should it be so well-known ?

Act V Scene 5

1. What are Richmond's priorities in his final speech ? Is it the sort of address we should expect from a victorious commander about to become king ?
2. Given all that has happened or been said in the play in connexion with the crown of England and the succession to the throne, what are we to make of l. 30, 'The true succeeders of each royal house' ?

I hope you enjoyed studying this play and that you'll get an opportunity to see it on stage. Good luck with your exam on it !

JBK