



AL English Literature Module Resource

EXAMPLE CHARACTER GRID: JOHN OF GAUNT

Activity: Complete the rest of this grid for John of Gaunt's character using the examples as a guide for the level of detail it is possible to include in your analysis.

How to Use the Character Grids:

- Skim through the text to pinpoint important moments in each character's development as the plot unfolds. (This is an excellent way to get to know the text really well).
- Some points may be quite simple; others will be more complex. The examples on this grid are there to show you just how much detail can be extracted from even small quotations. You do **not** have to write this much for each quotation, but don't shy away from tackling the complexities of Shakespeare's language. The most accomplished A Level essays contain plenty of detail.
- Pick up tips for **phrasing** as well as **terminology** from these examples. Notice the variety of expression and the way the analysis is **sustained**.
- When searching for character quotations, pay particular attention to:
 - first words and last words;
 - what other characters say about the chosen character;
 - how characters see themselves;
 - soliloquies and asides;
 - public versus private speeches;
 - whether they speak in prose or verse;
 - imagery, lexis and semantic fields they use a lot, etc.
- Use your notes from the materials on Canvas and the notes in your copy of the text to gather ideas about each character for the 'Point' column.
- Notice the conventions for copying quotations (such as line breaks for verse and brackets for omitted or altered words) in the 'Quotation' column.
- Use the glossary from *Mastering English Literature* and your notes in the text to help you identify key terminology to include in the 'Comment' column.

PLEASE NOTE:

- You do NOT have to learn all of these quotations for the examination, but finding and analysing them will be good practice to hone your essay-writing technique and will increase your familiarity with the play and with the ways in which Shakespeare uses language.
- Once you have finished your grid for each character you may find you have several examples of quotations illustrating the same point. You should choose the best and most memorable of these to learn.
- Remember that, as you will NOT have your books in the exam, these quotations are the vehicle by which you will be able to demonstrate your analytical skills. Make sure therefore, that you choose quotations about which there is plenty to say analytically.
- See Quotations and the Exams (in General Resources on Canvas) for further advice on learning quotations for the exams.

NAME OF CHARACTER: John of Gaunt

POINT A statement about the character	QUOTATION (OR EVIDENCE) A supporting example from the text	COMMENT (OR EXPLANATION) Discussion of the selected quotation, including analysis of <i>how</i> the author portrays the character using literary terminology where possible
Richard addresses Gaunt in respectful terms at the start of the play, referring to him as	'Old John of Gaunt, time-honoured Lancaster' (Act I, Scene I, line 1)	The epithet 'old' immediately establishes Gaunt as a wise, elderly man who has been a key figure at court for many years, as reinforced by the compound adjective 'time-honoured'. It is also synonymous with frailty though, and we see later on in the play that Richard rejects Gaunt's advice when it does not suit his purposes.
Gaunt is keen to resolve the issues between his son and Mowbray and to restore order:	'To be a make-peace shall become my age/Throw down, my son, the Duke of Norfolk's gage.' (Act I, Scene I, lines 160-161)	The noun 'make-piece' sums up Gaunt's role in the play. He is caught between King and son, and in the imperative 'Throw down (...) the Duke of Norfolk's gage', he urges his son to obey Richard and to avoid future discord.
Gaunt sees Richard as appointed by God, referring to him as	'God's substitute,/His deputy anointed in His sight'. (Act I, Scene 2, lines 37-38)	This is a clear reference to Gaunt's belief in the Divine Right of Kings. The nouns 'substitute' and 'deputy' make clear the idea that a King is appointed by God and is above ordinary, mortal men. The reference to Richard being 'anointed' reminds us of the holy oil used in the sacred ritual of coronation and symbolises God's power.

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We learn in this scene that Gaunt knows Richard is guilty of Gloucester's death:	'correction lieth in those hands/Which made the fault that we cannot correct'. (Act I, Scene 2, lines 4-5)	We sense Gaunt's helplessness in the the negative 'cannot' here; he knows of Richard's guilt but feels powerless to challenge him. Shakespeare uses metonymy in these lines, referring to Richard indirectly through his 'hands', echoing Gaunt's hesitation to accuse the King directly. Gaunt's bitterness at this injustice and his sense of helplessness are emphasised by the alliteration of the harsh plosive 'c' in 'cannot correct'.
The Duchess of Gloucester is disappointed by Gaunt's inaction, questioning his loyalty to his Gloucester:	'Finds brotherhood in thee no sharper spur?/Hath love in thy old blood no living fire?' (Act I, Scene 2, lines 9-10)	The Duchess' questions are designed to shame Gaunt. She sees his inaction as weakness and her references to 'brotherhood' and 'love' are emotive , reinforcing her disapproval. The adjective 'old' this time directly belittles Gaunt, and the metaphor 'living fire' implies he has lost his spark and the will to avenge his Gloucester's death.
Gaunt however will not take action against the King:	'Let heaven revenge, for I may never lift/An angry arm against His minister.' (Act I, Scene 2, lines 40-41)	This imperative implies that Gaunt sees the matter as out of his hands. Only 'heaven' (and therefore God) can punish Richard for his wrongdoing. The negative adverb 'never' stresses Gaunt's powerlessness in the face of his belief that Richard is answerable only to God.
When Bolingbroke bids him farewell however, Gaunt shows himself to be wholehearted in support of his son:	'let thy blows, doubly redoubled,/Fall like amazing thunder on the casque/Of thy adverse pernicious enemy.' (Act I, Scene III, lines 80-82)	Shakespeare's use of repetition in the phrase 'doubly redoubled' suggests Gaunt's support for his son. The semantic field of force is used in the references to 'blows', 'fall' and 'thunder' and the simile could be a mythological allusion to Zeus, connoting power and vengeance and suggesting his son may revive the family name by taking action. The adjectives 'adverse' and 'pernicious' highlight Gaunt's anger.

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Gaunt knows he is unlikely to see his son again:	‘My inch of taper will be burnt and done,/And blindfold Death not let me see my son.’ (Act I, Scene III, lines 221-224)	This metaphor likens Gaunt’s life to a candle that has almost ‘burnt’ out. The use of hendiadys in the phrase ‘burnt and done’ and the modal verb ‘will’ reinforce Gaunt’s certainty. The hypostatization (or personification) of ‘Death’ here, described as ‘blindfold’, emphasise the idea that it will take his sight, both literally and metaphorically, so that he never sees Bolingbroke again. The rhyming couplet stresses the finality of the image .
On his deathbed, Gaunt warns of the dangers of Richard’s character:	‘Light vanity, insatiate cormorant,/Consuming means, soon preys upon itself.’ (Act II, Scene I, lines 38-39)	Gaunt’s metaphor suggests that Richard’s ‘vanity’ and extravagance will eventually be his undoing. The adjective ‘insatiable’ compares these traits to a dangerous appetite that can never be satisfied. Like the cormorant who swallows its prey whole, Richard will eventually destroy himself if he cannot learn to practise restraint. This is prophetic and foreshadows Richard’s tragic demise as this vanity is his hamartia , and his reckless behaviour is his hubris .
Gaunt fears for England under Richard’s rule, describing it as	‘This royal throne of kings, this sceptred isle,/This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,/This other Eden, demi-paradise’. (Act II, Scene I, lines 40-43)	Here, Shakespeare uses listing and hyperbole to stress the beauty and power of England. This speech is filled with traditional imagery and ideals of patriotism . The semantic field of royalty, seen in the adjectives ‘royal’ and ‘sceptred’, and the description of England as a ‘throne’ stress the link between King and country. England here is depicted as a possession of Richard’s, filled with potential and promise. Biblical allusions liken the land itself to a ‘demi-paradise’, suggesting it is an earthly equivalent to the Garden of Eden, given by God. The mythological allusion to Mars, the god of war, suggests both that the King should be a god of war and that England herself is warlike and noble. This personification elevates England to the status of a character in her own right, thus heightening the sense of bathos and loss evoked when at the end of a long list of England’s wonderful qualities, Gaunt finally concludes this splendid land is ‘now leased out’ (line 59). In other words, Richard is squandering England’s great potential and throwing her reputation into jeopardy.

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