

1st Hour
for Monday 4/14/14

Hamlet

English IV AP Literature and Composition
Socratic Seminar Discussion Topics 2014

Due Monday. Final product should be at least one to two-typed pages of analysis consisting of both your insight and evidence from the text to support your assertions. Make sure to cite your evidence from the text correctly with correct Act, Scene, and Lines (3.2.234-236).

1. Look at the issue of fathers and sons. In *Hamlet* we find three almost parallel sets of fathers and sons -- King Hamlet and Hamlet, Polonius and Laertes, and Old King Fortinbras and young Fortinbras. Each son has had a father killed. Compare the three pairs. Why does Shakespeare create these three parallel sets for *Hamlet*? Look at the play as a whole. Look closely at individual lines. Develop a thesis, explore it, and connect it to the rest of the play.

Sarah

2. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are relatively minor characters in the play; nevertheless, Tom Stoppard chose them as the main characters in his absurdist play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* in which Hamlet is rewritten from their point of view. Examine Shakespeare's creation of these two characters. Write a character sketch of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern using very specific lines and examples from the play to support your point. What is their "role" in the play? Why include them at all? What, if anything, is their significance?

Vanessa

3. Claudius says of Hamlet, "Madness in great ones must not unwatched go" (III.i.203) and Polonius says of Hamlet, "Though this be madness, yet there is method in't" (II, ii, 223). Is Hamlet mad? Is he simply putting "an antic disposition on" as he suggests in Act I, scene v, line 171? Is there a point at which his play-acting becomes truth? Consider tracking Hamlet's psychological state through the course of the play using a graphic organizer (X-Axis, Y-Axis). Your own insight will comprise the "Y-Axis," and the direct quotes from the play will create the "X-Axis."

Tada

4. Read about tragedy and the tragic hero. Look at other definitions of "hero." Is Hamlet a hero or not? Is Hamlet's death a tragic death? Support your points in the universality of the play. Look closely and critically at this topic and go beyond the obvious.

Alic

5. Examine the character of Ophelia. What is her relationship with her father and brother? What is her relationship with Hamlet? With Gertrude? Write a character sketch of Ophelia using very specific lines and examples from the play to support your points. What is her "role" in the play? An interesting look into Ophelia's character and the development of that character is revealed through her songs and the flowers she distributes in her madness. You might want to examine this scene for "double meanings." Look at the language of flowers. What does rosemary stand for? Pansies?

Mattie
C

6. Can you help but feel sympathy for Ophelia? In a matter of hours, her relationship with Hamlet ends abruptly, her father is murdered by her former lover, and her brother (to whom she looks for guidance and support) leaves town. Such a series of events would challenge the resolve of even the most stouthearted, but Ophelia is especially vulnerable. Throughout the play, her weakness in character permits her to be manipulated by those whom she loves most—her father, her brother, and her lover. Examine the instances during which Polonius, Laertes, and Hamlet manipulate Ophelia to serve their own purposes, and consider where Ophelia's character furthers her suffering when the series of trying events occurs.

Allison
E

7. The character of Gertrude has been equally fascinating to critics. Is she a strong, ambitious, manipulative woman? Is she a weak woman who is incomplete without a strong man? Does she fall somewhere between these extreme dichotomies? Examine her character carefully within the universe of the play. Write a character sketch of Gertrude using evidence from the text to support your points. Pay particular attention to Hamlet's rants and ravings as well as her unfaltering loyalty to Claudius (even after Hamlet reveals to her what he knows).

Kim F

8. Readers and critics have differed dramatically over the years as they have tried to identify the climax of the play. There are many points when Hamlet is determined to avenge his father's death. At what point does he commit himself so that there is no turning back? Discuss the possible "climaxes" or pivotal points in the play. Determine which is the actual climax and support your assertion with clear evidence from the text.

Georgia
J

Margarets.

9. Discuss Hamlet's character. Is he the "sweet prince," too sensitive and good for the world as "rank" as Denmark has become? Is he an ambitious young man eager to attain the throne of Denmark and willing to go to any extreme to do so? Is he both? Look closely and critically at this topic and go beyond the obvious. Support your contentions with close and careful references to the text.

Amelia

10. Hamlet and Laertes seek revenge, each in his own way. Hamlet carefully considers the action he undertakes—some contend to the point of delaying unnecessarily. Laertes, in contrast, acts hastily and under the direction of Claudius. Analyze the course that each character pursues to achieve his goal.

Maggie J

Michelle

11. Some critics have described Claudius as a "slimy beast." Others have drawn a more positive and complex picture of him. Write a character sketch of Claudius and support your contentions with evidence from the text. Look at him in all his complexity and examine all his possible motivations. Go beyond the obvious.

Cory

12. If Hamlet had killed Claudius in Act III and the play had ended there, what would be missing in Hamlet's perceptions of himself and the world? How does his character develop in Acts IV and V? What softens our realization that Hamlet is in various degrees responsible for the deaths of Polonius, Ophelia, Laertes, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, Claudius, and Gertrude?

13. Trace a word or image through the play and connect its significance to the play as a whole. A website which lets you search the play for words and phrases is [<http://the-tech.mit.edu/Shakespeare/> | <http://the-tech.mit.edu/Shakespeare/>. Here are some ideas:

Madi

13a. The play begins with a question: "Who's there?" (I.i.1). Examined closely, one will note that the play contains an extraordinary number of questions. Look at all the interrogatories in the play -- all the lines that begin with "who, what, when, where, why, how" and/or end in question marks. Trace this throughout the play and discuss its significance to the play as a whole.

Allie M

13b. The power (or failure) of language is another issue in the play. When Polonius asks Hamlet what he is reading, he says "words, words, words," and later Hamlet says that he "must like a whore unpack [his] heart with words" (II.ii). Trace "word" through the play and look at issues of language. What does it suggest about the play as a whole?

Sydney O

13c. The image of a fallen Eden is threaded throughout the play. Trace this image through the play and connect it to the larger concerns of the play.

Sydney P

13d. In Act II.ii.236, Hamlet says that "Denmark is a prison." Trace the images of prisons and confinement through the play.

Kirsten

13e. Look at the role of acting in the play and its significance to the text as a whole. Consider Hamlet's advice to the players and the play within a play.

Christina R

14. In Act I, scene iv, Hamlet says, "I do not set my life at a pin's fee." Later in Act II, scene ii, he says to Polonius, "You cannot take from me anything I will not more willingly part withal -- except my life, except my life, except my life." What is Hamlet's attitude toward death? Why? Don't settle for what is obvious and easy. Look closely at all his speeches about death, including the graveyard scene and his comments on "poor Yorick" as well as his more famous speeches -- "To be or not to be" and "Oh that this too, too sullied flesh would melt." Why does he feel the way he feels? Is his death inevitable?

Sam

16. Poetic justice is a term referring to a story's end in which virtue is rewarded and vice is punished. Review the last three scenes of the play carefully and explore the logical and perhaps necessary result of the demise of at least two of the characters. Present evidence suggesting these characters received their "just desserts" based on circumstances, their words, actions, and choices made throughout the play and that their ultimate demise was fitting "poetic justice."

17. Look closely at two of Hamlet's soliloquies. We did this extensively in class, so compile your notes, and your own insights by taking a closer look at the language, the use of literary devices and its significance throughout the rest of the play.

17a) 1st soliloquy, I.2.133
3rd soliloquy, III.1.63

Mary S

17b) 2nd soliloquy, II.2.575
4th soliloquy, IV.4.203

Sophie S