

AP English Lit - ***please pick up this and 12th grade packet***

Week 2 Optional Educational Activities

Hamlet's Soliloquy

(from Shakespeare's Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, Act III, Scene i)

HAMLET:

To be, or not to be—that is the question:

Whether 'tis* nobler in the mind to suffer

*it is

The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune

Or to take arms against a sea of troubles

And by opposing end them. To die, to sleep—

5

No more—and by a sleep to say we end

The heartache, and the thousand natural shocks

That flesh is heir to. 'Tis a consummation* *resolution

Devoutly to be wished. To die, to sleep—

To sleep—perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub,*

*problem

10

For in that sleep of death what dreams may come

When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,*

*life

Must give us pause. There's the respect

That makes calamity* of so long life.

*tragedy

15

For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,

Th' oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,*

*contempt

The pangs of despised love, the law's delay,

The insolence of office, and the spurns

That patient merit of th' unworthy takes,

When he himself might his quietus* make

*death

20

With a bare bodkin*? Who would fardels† bear,

*dagger †burdens

To grunt and sweat under a weary life,

But that the dread of something after death,

The undiscovered country, from whose bourn*

*border

25

No traveler returns, puzzles the will,

And makes us rather bear those ills we have

Than fly to others that we know not of?

Thus conscience does make cowards of us all,

And thus the native hue* of resolution

*natural color

30

Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,

And enterprise of great pitch and moment

With this regard their currents turn awry

And lose the name of action.

Text—“Hamlet’s Soliloquy”

Surveying the Text

The first text you will read is the famous “To be, or not to be” speech from Shakespeare’s play Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, which was published in 1604 under the title *The Tragicall Historie of Hamlet, Prince of Denmarke*. That speech is a soliloquy, a convention used by playwrights to allow the audience to hear the thoughts of a character.

Take a few moments to look over the text, and then answer the following questions:

1. What prior experiences have you had reading plays?
2. What did you notice about the page format and annotations?
3. What did you notice about the text’s structure?

Making Predictions and Asking Questions

When approaching a new text, you should always try to draw on your prior experiences to help you predict what the text might be about.

The following questions will help you do so:

1. What is a tragedy? What themes and outcomes would you expect to find in a tragedy?
2. What do you know about the language in plays written by Shakespeare?
3. What have you done in the past to help yourself read Shakespeare effectively?
4. The soliloquy here begins with a famous quotation: “To be, or not to be—that is the question.”
What do you think is “the question” Hamlet is asking?

How do you think he might answer it?

Understanding Key Vocabulary

Shakespeare’s texts are often difficult because he uses words that are no longer in frequent use, even though they were common when he wrote his plays. Several words in Hamlet’s soliloquy fit into this category. You will see in the text that some words are marked with an asterisk (*); a definition or synonym is provided to the right of the line for those words.

Polar Opposites

An important rhetorical device Shakespeare uses in Hamlet’s soliloquy is antithesis, or a balance of opposites. Hamlet explores a series of oppositional relationships in his speech, beginning with the question of “to be, or not to be.” For this vocabulary activity, you will explore some of these antithetical relationships by brainstorming antonyms for the terms listed below.

Term	Antonym
oppression	_____
action	_____
endurance	_____
mystery	_____
life	_____

Word Families

List as many words as possible that are related to the following five concepts from Hamlet’s soliloquy:

1. action
2. thought
3. suffering
4. mortality
5. fear

You may include synonyms directly from the text along with any other words you believe are related to the concept. Word families are not simply lists of synonyms; they may include any sets of words that frequently appear together. For example, “brackish” and “water” are part of the same word family.

Example:

resolution: end (line 5), consummation (line 8), will (line 25), decision, outcome, and result

Term	Word Family
action	_____
thought	_____
suffering	_____
mortality	_____
fear	_____

Reading

First Reading

Read the soliloquy from Hamlet. Although it is quite short, it packs much meaning into its 33 lines. You may need to read it more than once before you feel you have a good grasp of the ideas it contains.

Background

At this point in the play, Hamlet feels that he is in a crisis. His father died a few months earlier under mysterious circumstances. Hamlet discovers that his father was secretly murdered—by Hamlet’s uncle, Claudius. Making things even worse, Claudius then marries Hamlet’s mother. Hamlet does not know what to do about this knowledge. He wonders whether he can trust anyone or if perhaps he is going crazy.

As you first read the text, focus on what you see as the “big picture” Hamlet describes. Based on this first reading, would you say that Hamlet is an optimist or a pessimist? What are your reasons for thinking so?

Considering the Structure of the Text

Look again at the structure of Hamlet’s soliloquy. Then answer the following questions with a small group or partner about how this speech is organized:

1. Where does Hamlet ask the central question of his soliloquy?
2. Where does he restate this question in greater detail?
3. Does Hamlet ever answer this question?
4. Does he ask any other questions in this speech?
5. Who or what interrupts Hamlet at the end of his soliloquy? Do you think he was finished talking?

Noticing Language

Identify the main clause (subject and verb) in the following sentence. Then paraphrase the main idea of this sentence in your own words:

*For in that sleep of death what dreams may come / When we have shuffled off
this mortal coil, / Must give us pause.*

Annotating and Questioning the Text

Because this series of texts focuses on the way people value life, you will now need to take a second look at the soliloquy. This time, read the text with a yellow highlighter or colored pencil (or devise some other way of marking the text in a unique and easily recognizable way), marking the places in the text where Hamlet describes what it means to be alive.

Example:

In lines 2-3, Hamlet describes life as “the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,” so you could highlight that phrase as an example of what Hamlet thinks it means “to be.”

Characterizing the Text

Take a look at the parts of the soliloquy you have highlighted, and compare them with a classmate’s markings. Find a few examples that you both have highlighted, and mark the examples with a “+” or “-” to indicate whether the examples show a positive (+) outlook on life or a negative (-) one. For the example above (“the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune”), you would mark a “-” because it compares being alive to being under attack. After you have marked several such examples, reflect on the question asked earlier: At this moment, does it seem as if Hamlet is an optimist or a pessimist?

Analyzing Stylistic Choices

Continuing to work with your partner, identify three figures of speech Hamlet uses to express himself. These could include metaphors or personification. Remember, a metaphor is a figure of speech that compares two unlike items without using the words “like” or “as” while personification gives human characteristics to a nonhuman.

For instance, when Hamlet calls whatever happens after death “the undiscovered country from whose bourn no traveler returns,” he’s metaphorically comparing the mysteries of the afterlife to dangerous, uncharted lands—something explorers from Shakespeare’s time period were deeply interested in. Use your annotations from Activity 7 to find more figures of speech.

Next, paraphrase these figures of speech. “Paraphrasing” means putting the ideas of another writer into your own words. Again using the “slings and arrows of outrageous fortune” metaphor, a paraphrase might sound something like this: “Hamlet compares being alive to having fate shoot arrows at him.” As you paraphrase, pay attention to the style used by Shakespeare to convey his ideas. What is the difference between having Hamlet say that life is like “the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune” and having him just say, “Life isn’t very pleasant”? What are the effects of Shakespeare’s stylistic choices as a writer?

Summarizing

Use your annotations to answer the following questions:

- What is the big issue in Hamlet's soliloquy?

- What claim or argument about the value of life does Hamlet make?

- What do you think about the Hamlet's claim?

At this point, you may jot quick answers to these questions in your notes or on the text itself. Later, you'll use these responses to begin completing a graphic organizer comparing all the reading selections you'll analyze for this module ("Charting Claims Across Multiple Texts").

Thinking Critically

We identified the genre earlier as drama, but more specifically, this is a soliloquy. As noted earlier, a soliloquy is a dramatic convention that allows a character to speak aloud his or her thoughts.

From your reading of the soliloquy, record your answers to the following questions:

1. Does the soliloquy form seem to favor the expression of emotion (pathos) or logic (logos)? Explain your answer.

2. Does Hamlet's soliloquy use emotion (pathos) to create a specific effect on the reader? If so, describe how emotion is used.

3. Does Hamlet's soliloquy use logic (logos) to create specific effects on the reader? If so, describe how the logic is used.

4. When Hamlet speaks his soliloquy, he is in crisis. How do his circumstances position Hamlet to speak with authority (ethos) about the value of life? Does Hamlet seem to be speaking about his life in particular or about the quality of life in general?

5. As careful readers, we are, of course, aware that it is not really Hamlet speaking, but a character created by Shakespeare. Does Shakespeare seem like someone whose opinions and attitudes are worth considering? Why?

Poetry

The World Is Too Much With Us

By William Wordsworth

The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers;—
Little we see in Nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!
This Sea that bares her bosom to the moon;
The winds that will be howling at all hours,
And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers;
For this, for everything, we are out of tune;
It moves us not. Great God! I'd rather be
A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn.

1. Vocabulary:

boon (4)

Proteus (13)

Triton(14)

What two relevant denotations has "wreathèd"?

2. Explain why the poet's words are more effective than these possible alternatives:

earth for "world" (1);

swelling and buying for "getting and spending" (2);

exposes for "bares" (5);

dozing for "sleeping" (7);

poisies for "flowers" (7);

nourished for "suckled" (10);

visions for "glimpses" (12);

sound for "blow" (14).

3. Is "Great God" (9) a vocative (term of address) or an expletive (exclamation)? Or something of both?

4. State the theme (central idea) of the poem in a sentence.

Desert Places

By Robert Frost

Snow falling and night falling fast, oh, fast
In a field I looked into going past,
And the ground almost covered smooth in snow,
But a few weeds and stubble showing last.

The woods around it have it--it is theirs.
All animals are smothered in their lairs.
I am too absent-spirited to count;
The loneliness includes me unawares.

And lonely as it is that loneliness
Will be more lonely ere it will be less--
A blanker whiteness of benighted snow
With no expression, nothing to express.

They cannot scare me with their empty spaces
Between stars--on stars where no human race is.
I have it in me so much nearer home
To scare myself with my own desert places.



