

**MRHS English Presents:
A Shakespearean Historical Tragedy
Written in 1601-1602
Performed First in July, 1602**



Hamlet

By William Shakespeare

Opening:
May 2010
Coffin Theatre
Room 229
Morell High School

Study Calendar

Choice Activities

Final Examination Essay Topics

Writing a Literary Essay

Hamlet Unit

While studying this unit, we will read, watch, and perform this Shakespearean tragedy. Typically, we will read or perform a scene together and then watch trained actors do the same, while identifying significant plot details and important literary elements. During the next three weeks, students will also be required to complete various activities to demonstrate comprehension. In total, 12 Kroner (Danish currency) worth of activities will be completed. The oral presentation is compulsory (it must be done). The other eight points are students' choice.

English 621 Calendar – May 19 – June 9, 2010				
17	18	19	20	21
24	25	26	27	28
Victoria Day		4 Kroner Due		Act I-III Test
31	1	2	3	4
		4 Kroner Due		
7	8	9	10	11
Kroner Due		Final Test	Final Exams	Final Exams

Hamlet Choice Activities (Each Valued at 4 Kroner)

Hamlet Oral Presentations (Compulsory for All Students)

Your task is to choose ONE or TWO passages to present orally. Lines must be memorized, and performed (with Coffin-approval). Your passage(s) must be at least 10 lines. An oral presentation rubric is available from Coffin. This may be completed any day during the unit (but must be presented by June 7 – the last presentation day).

A Series of Alternate Unfortunate Events (4 Kroner)

Imagine that some of the main events (to the point in the play to which you've read) transpired differently – but still had bad results. Create three alternative circumstances (like what would happen if Francisco and Bernardo were sleeping on duty when Hamlet's father first appeared on the battlements) and tell a brief story about how the story might have played differently...but still tragically. This should be in the 250-500 word range.

Moral Dilemmas (4 Kroner)

Every story/play involves some difficult moral questions (perhaps none more than in Hamlet). For Hamlet, pose four difficult moral questions and then provide possible answers to them. Each response should be around 75-100 words.

Comic Strip (4 Kroner)

Create a 12-15 panel comic strip which accurately tells the story of one scene in the play. Make sure you choose a significant event or occurrence. It does not have to be in color. Dialogue balloons or narration are required.

Re-Inventing the Context (4 Kroner)

We know Hamlet has origins in many historical documents, but let's assume Shakespeare got the idea for Hamlet from another source. Your task is to create the fictional context for this play based on Shakespeare's own life and experience. Write a narrative (500 or so words) explaining what was going on in William's life that inspired him to come up with Hamlet's plot. This can be written in first (as Shakespeare himself) or third-person (an observer).

Song Parody or Original Song (4 Kroner – 8 Kroner)

Write a song parody or original song using the plot of Hamlet as your subject. The parody should borrow the tune of a popular song and substitute its lyrics for your own. If you actually want to perform it, it can be worth 8 Kroner. Writing and performing an original song is also quite acceptable. Performances can occur any day until June 7.

Shakespeare Re-Told (4 Kroner (if written) – 8 Kroner (if performed))

Update the setting, time, storyline, and characters of the play. Think of a modern re-telling of the play. If you want to perform it in class or on film, it can be worth up to 8 Kroner (depending upon how much of the play we have covered to that point). If chosen, this assignment must be submitted on June 7.

Film a Scene (4 Kroner – 8 Kroner, depending on the length of the scene)

Groups of students perform a short scene from our play together on video. Students from other classes may also participate, but the scene must be unscripted and true to the original script. These must be submitted on June 7.

Hamlet on Audio (4 Kroner – 8 Kroner, depending on the length of the scene):

Using audio equipment (at home or at school), record a vital scene from Hamlet. Ensure that you use sound effects, voice pitch and pace (and accent, if possible). Provide the audio file to Coffin for assessment by June 7.

Hamlet Final Exam Essay Topics

The final exam will require you to prepare to write a major essay. Since the study of English encourages students to plan, each student is REQUIRED to prepare an outline for ONE of the following essays below. Outlines must be prepared using proper MLA style. Students take a GOOD COPY of the outline to the exam to produce a literary essay of 1000-1500 words which examines and supports (using passages from the play) their chosen topic.

1. Analyze the use of comedy in Hamlet, paying particular attention to the gravediggers, Osric, and Polonius. Does comedy serve merely to relieve the tension of the tragedy, or do the comic scenes serve a more serious thematic purpose as well? Explain, using textual evidence.
2. Conflict is essential to drama. Show that Hamlet presents both an outward and inward conflict.
3. Consider Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's role in Hamlet. Why might Shakespeare have created characters like this? Are they there for comic relief, or do they serve a more serious purpose? Why does the news of their deaths come only after the deaths of the royal family in Act V, as if this news were not anticlimactic? Is it acceptable for Hamlet to treat them as he does? Why or why not?
4. Discuss the importance of appearance and reality in Hamlet (hint: Why is Hamlet so interested in the players)?
5. Discuss the importance in Hamlet of one of the following: (a) Ophelia, (b) Rosencrantz & Guildenstern, (c) the ghost of Hamlet senior, (d) Polonius, (e) Fortinbras, (f) Gertrude. Do not just write about what these people do. Discuss how an attention to them illuminates issues of central importance to the play as a whole (i.e., deal with matters of importance to the thematic or character development in the play, not with matters of the plot).
6. Does Hamlet live and die by making free choices, or are his choices all controlled by forces larger than himself?
7. Does Hamlet act in accordance with Polonius's advice to Laertes? (Hamlet didn't necessarily hear the advice, but he may share this courtly value system anyway, having been raised to defend himself against plots and conniving so he could rule after his father).
8. Examine the conflict between planning to do something and actually doing it in Hamlet.
9. How do Hamlet's seven soliloquies reveal his character? Provide evidence to support your claims from EACH of his soliloquies.
10. Identify the three revenge plots in Hamlet, and explain why each is important to the development of the play.
11. Is something rotten in the state of Denmark? If so, what precisely is it? Is anyone in particular responsible or is the rottenness simply a condition of life?
12. Look through the text and find five questions that drive the theme, characters, or plot of the play. Explain why the questions are important and why Shakespeare poses them as questions and not as answers.
13. Many critics argue that Hamlet's inability to act and tendency toward melancholy reflection is a "tragic flaw" that leads inevitably to his demise. Is this an accurate way of understanding the play? Why or why not? Given Hamlet's character and situation, would another outcome of the play have been possible?
14. Mel Gibson (who also plays Hamlet in a film version of the play) says that all of the deaths during the play result from Hamlet's decision not to kill Claudius while he is praying. Agree or disagree and explain why.
15. Reveal the philosophy of Hamlet by his affectionate love of the theater.
16. Select a particular scene in Hamlet (preferably a short one) and discuss its importance in the play. How does this particular part of the action contribute significantly to our response to what is going on? What might be missing if a director decided to cut this scene (e.g., Claudius at prayer, the scene between Polonius and Reynaldo, or the gravedigger scene).
17. Select one of Hamlet's soliloquies and, by a detailed attention to the poetry, discuss the nature of Hamlet's feelings as they reveal themselves in this speech. What insights might this speech provide into the prince's elusive character? Confine your attention strictly to the soliloquy you have selected.
18. Shakespeare includes characters in Hamlet who are obvious foils (opposites) for Hamlet, including, most obviously, Horatio, Fortinbras, Claudius, and Laertes. Compare and contrast Hamlet with each of these characters. How are they alike? How are they different? How does each respond to the crises with which he is faced? When necessary - and it will be - provide textual evidence to support claims.
19. Suicide is an important theme in Hamlet. Discuss how the play treats the idea of suicide morally, religiously, and aesthetically, with particular attention to Hamlet's two important statements about suicide: the "O, that this too too solid flesh would melt" soliloquy (I.ii.129-158) and the "To be, or not to be" soliloquy (III.i.56-88). Why does Hamlet believe that, although capable of suicide, most human beings choose to live, despite the cruelty, pain, and injustice of the world?
20. Think about Hamlet's relationship with Ophelia. Does he love her? Does he stop loving her? Did he ever love her? What evidence can you find in the play to support your opinion?
21. Throughout the play, Hamlet claims to be feigning madness, but his portrayal of a madman is so intense and so convincing that many readers believe Hamlet actually slips into insanity at certain moments in the play. Do you think this is true, or is Hamlet merely play-acting insanity? What evidence can you cite for either claim?
22. To what extent are the female characters in this drama pivotal to the story's structure? (That is, try defending or modifying this thesis statement: *Everything that happens in this play occurs because of a woman.*) [Hint: What are Claudius's motives for killing his brother? What finally moves Hamlet to kill Claudius?]

Arrive with Hamlet and a good copy MLA essay outline. Use the outline to craft an intelligent, witty, and well-written essay based on one topic above. Outlines must be typed with NO MORE THAN SIX WORDS per line. Give essays titles and USE SECTION HEADINGS for each new section. Essays should be 1000-1500 words and double-spaced. Avoid summarizing the plot and - when citing particular sections of the play, use proper MLA rules.

- Try to write about something about the play that you find interesting. Choose a topic that you can examine further in essay form.
- Remember, your topic should also address the discussions surrounding our play. Again, read the front and back matter of your play, check out sparknotes and cliffnotes and discuss with peers.
- Give your essay an interesting title that leaves no doubt about the position you are taking.
- Assume a very intelligent reader will be looking over the work, and that he's read the play, but he has NEVER examined the theme. That's your job.
- Keep your tone straightforward and your explanations concise, which means don't waste words – be clear without being overly-verbose.
- Write as directly and clearly as you can, but remember that 'simple' isn't 'simplistic': it's clear and to the point.
- **Don't retell the story. A re-telling of the plot is of limited value in literary essays and is usually used only to set up the context of the quotations you plan to analyze.** Instead, express an opinion about what you've read.
- Don't be afraid to take risks to interpret. Aim for a thesis that not everyone would agree with.
- Don't assume there's one correct view; in literary study there isn't. This does not mean that ANY position you take about is correct; some arguments fit the evidence better than others, so be careful about the one you make.
- Make sure any argument you present is supported by text evidence (properly-cited lines from the play).
- Explain your arguments thoroughly and patiently. Don't expect the handsome reader to grasp your claims easily.
- Show that you care about your work by proofreading carefully for small errors.

Organizing a Literary Essay

- Organize your paragraphs according to the development of your argument, not the chronological order of the text.
- Cover one argument per section of your essay.
- Use transitions to show how sections are logically connected to each other and to your thesis.
- In this examination, you shall be required to use HEADINGS for each section of your essay:
 - Introduction (but give it a creative, catchy title)
 - Paragraph 1 Title (catchy title)
 - Paragraph 2 Title (catchy title)
 - Paragraph 3 Title; and so on (catchy title[s])
 - Conclusion (again, use a catchy title)
- Don't try to say everything you've learned in one essay.
- Use present tense to show that literary works and the issues are still alive. Not "*Don John was...*" but "*Don John is...*"

Supporting Your Points

- Select only those quotations that advance and support your particular thesis. Keep them as brief as possible.
- Set up quotations with a brief reminder to readers of what is happening in the text at that point (but don't summarize plot), followed by some sort of analysis of the passage.
- Integrate quotations into your essay so that everything reads as coherent sentences (use the Three Steps).
- When quoting the play, make certain to use proper MLA in-text quotation: (Act. Scene. Line.)
- Roman Numerals must be used for act/scene. For example: *It is clear that Dogberry is an uneducated man when he states that he and Verges are "the malefactors."* (III. iv. 81-82)

- Have a strong introduction that clearly states an integrated thesis that is thoughtful, argumentative, and specific; strong introductions 'hook' the reader. How will you hook?
- Integrate supporting details, examples, and quotes with insightful, on topic information to support analysis. This shows the reader that you – as a Shakespeare reader – have fully understood the play and the essay you choose.
- Use well-selected textual evidence & create substantial proof of thesis, meaning students will use actual lines from the play in order to support any claims they make about the play.
- Use the Three Steps to In-Text Citations:
 - Analyze how the evidence supports the main idea of the section (using the Three Steps);
 - Don't just insert a line from the play without telling the reader how it supports your thesis.
 - insightfully connects analysis to the thesis;
- Remember, the entire essay is being written to support a thesis statement.
 - If you wander in another direction during the writing of your essay, then you aren't staying on topic.
- Select the most effective organizational pattern in support of the thesis;

What is the Best Way to Set Up This Essay?

- use transitions to effectively link ideas;
- avoid slang and saying "you" or "I";
- show maturity through precise word choices, sentence variety, and paragraph development;
- be free of spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors;
- keep a consistent tense

The Outline

- Must be typed or neatly-handwritten on a single page.
- Four identification lines in top left corner
- Parallelism is still very important
- Must include the following elements/headings:
 - Title of your essay (centered at the top of the page)
 - Introduction (use the catchy one you created)
 - Under the Introduction, write out thesis statement.
 - Section One (but use your catchy name)
 - Section Two (but use your catchy name)
 - Section Three (you MUST have at least three)
 - Conclusion (again, use a catchy phrase)

More Outline Stuff

- No line in your outline may exceed eight words.
- Outlines follow this format:

I. Introduction
Thesis Statement

II. Section One
A. Supporting Detail
B. Supporting Detail
1. More Info
2. More Info
C. Supporting Detail

III. Section Two

General Rules for this Exam Essay

- You will be required to stay for 1.5 hours.
- Essays must be double-spaced.
- You MUST arrive with your outline prepared or it shall receive NO CREDIT.
- Essays must be within the 1000 word range.
- If you use quotes LONGER than four lines, then the quote must be indented on both sides AND single-spaced.