

Expository Reading/Writing

Module 4: The Value of Life

Hamlet Soliloquy

Group Members: _____

Period: _____

As you read Hamlet's "To Be or Not To Be" soliloquy, discuss the following questions and complete the tasks with your group members. Record your responses together as a group in the spaces below each question. Rotate scribes so that I can tell EVERYONE is involved! Submit to the inbox when you are finished.

Questions (before reading): Surveying the Text

1. What prior experience do you have reading plays?
 - a. What experience do you have reading Shakespeare plays, specifically?
2. Skim the soliloquy. What did you notice about the format and annotations?
3. What did you notice about the text's structure? (*consider the lines, line breaks, formatting of ideas, etc.*)

Questions (before reading): Making Predictions

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 of Shakespearean plays?
3. The soliloquy here begins with a famous quote. What do you think is "the question" that Hamlet cites? How do you think he might answer it?

Task: Vocabulary

Skim through the play as a first-read. Circle or highlight any words that are unfamiliar to you. Spend some time before reading to look up these words with a dictionary or group discussion. Record them in your WNB (left side) if you wish.

Task: Understanding Background - read the following background information about the play.

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.

Task: Read the Text with annotations As you first read the text, focus on what you see is the "big picture" that Hamlet describes.

Question:

Based on this first reading, would you say that Hamlet is an optimist or a pessimist? What are your reasons for thinking so?

Questions:

1. Where does Hamlet ask the central question of his soliloquy?
2. Where does he restate his question in greater detail?
3. Does Hamlet ever answer his question? Explain.
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 speaking?

Task: Noticing Language

Identify the main clause (subject and verb) in the following sentence, then paraphrase the main idea 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."

Main clause =

Paraphrase main idea:

Task: Reading the Text (take two!)

This time, read the text with a different color highlighter or pen/pencil (or devise some other way of marking the text in a different way than before), and mark 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 he thinks it means “to be.”

Now, look over the parts of the soliloquy you have marked, and put a “+” or a “-” to indicate whether they show a positive (+) or negative (-) outlook on life. For the example above, you would mark “-” because he compares being alive to being under attack.

Discuss again with your group: Is Hamlet more an optimist or a pessimist? Why?

Task: Analyzing Stylistic Choices

Identify THREE figures of speech (literary devices) that Hamlet uses to express himself. This could include metaphors, personification, similes, foreshadowing, symbolism, etc. Once you have identified and recorded your figures of speech below, paraphrase each in your own words.

Example: “slings and arrows of outrageous fortune” is a metaphor. Paraphrase = Hamlet compares being alive to having arrows shot at him.

1.

Paraphrase:

2.

Paraphrase:

3.

Paraphrase:

Questions: Summarize the reading

1. What is the big issue in Hamlet's soliloquy?
2. What claim or argument about the value of life does Hamlet make?
3. What do you think about Hamlet's claim?

Questions: Thinking Critically

1. Does the soliloquy form seem to favor the expression of emotion (pathos) or logic (logos)? Explain.
2. Does Hamlet's soliloquy use emotion and/or logic to create a specific effect on the reader? Explain.
3. 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 he seem to be speaking about his life specifically, or life in general?