

Hamlet: Key Essay Questions for Students

Themes, Characters, and Critical Perspectives

Themes & Ideas

1. To what extent is Hamlet a play about indecision?
2. How does Shakespeare explore the theme of revenge in Hamlet?
3. What role does madness (real or pretended) play in the tragedy?
4. How does the play reflect on death and mortality?
5. Is Hamlet ultimately a play about justice or about corruption?

Characters

6. Is Hamlet a tragic hero? Why or why not?
7. Compare Hamlet and Laertes as avengers. Who is more successful?
8. How is Claudius both a villain and a human being?
9. In what ways is Gertrude guilty, and in what ways is she innocent?
10. What does Ophelia's downfall reveal about women in the world of Hamlet?

Structure & Techniques

11. How does the play-within-a-play ("The Mousetrap") contribute to the action?
12. Discuss the significance of the soliloquies in revealing Hamlet's character.
13. What role does the supernatural (the Ghost) play in shaping the story?
14. How does Shakespeare use irony in Hamlet?
15. How is the theme of appearance vs. reality presented in the play?

Philosophical & Critical Lenses

16. Does Hamlet overthink, or does he think too clearly?
17. What does Hamlet suggest about fate versus free will?
18. Can Hamlet's madness be seen as a form of wisdom?
19. Is Hamlet's hesitation justified, or does it lead to unnecessary tragedy?
20. Does the ending of Hamlet provide resolution, or does it raise more questions?

THE END

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