

## Advanced Placement Literature Hamlet Essay

Choose one of the following essay prompts and write a well thought out critical analysis. Your essay must follow MLA guidelines, be three to five pages, and have a minimum of 3 sources in addition to the play itself.

IN ADDITION: YOUR SOURCES MUST BE ATTACHED AND THE PIECES YOU CITE MUST BE HIGHLIGHTED. THIS IS NEW!!!!

1982 AP Question: In great literature, no scene of violence exists for its own sake. Hamlet confronts the reader or audience with a scene or scenes of violence. In a well-organized essay, explain how the scene or scenes **contribute to the meaning of the [play]**.

Thesis (possible):

**Though other events in this play exhibit violence, nothing so effectively captures and concludes the essence of this work like the last battle to purge the kingdom.**

1988 AP Question: [In *Hamlet*] some of the most significant events are mental or psychological; for example, awakenings, discoveries, changes in consciousness. In a well-organized essay, describe how the author **manages to give these internal events the sense of excitement, suspense, and climax usually associated with external action.**

Thesis (possible):

**Although Hamlet vows and speaks of action, it is his anguished soliloquies and asides that awaken him from despondency to excitement and final action.**

Or: **Before Hamlet can physically move to avenge his father's murder and purge the kingdom, he must mentally accept the truths that people are liars, wear masks and die.**

1994 AP Question: In [*Hamlet*] a character who appears briefly, or does not appear at all, is a **significant presence**. Write an essay in which you show how such a character functions in the work. You may wish to discuss how the character affects action, theme, or the development of other characters. (select: King Hamlet's ghost or Fortinbras)

Thesis (possible):

**With the appearance of King Hamlet's ghost, Prince Hamlet receives a clouded mission to avenge his father's murder and purge the poisoned kingdom.** (ghost story, detective story, revenge story =the ghost provides all of these...OR use the one alluded and three actual appearance of the ghost...one / paragraph (before Hamlet is told, the sentinels and Horatio, to Hamlet on the walk and finally in his Mother's chambers / he alone)

**1996 AP Question:** The British novelist Fay Weldon offers this observation about happy endings: “The writers, I do believe, who get the best and most lasting response from the readers are the writers [like Shakespeare] who offer a happy **ending through moral development**. By a happy ending, I do not mean mere fortunate events—a marriage or a last minute rescue from death—but some kind of **spiritual reassessment or moral reconciliation, even with the self, even at death**.”

[*Hamlet*] has the kind of ending Weldon describes. In a well-written essay, identify the “spiritual reassessment or moral reconciliation” evident in the ending and explain its significance in the work as a whole.

Thesis (possible):

**In the final scene, the multiple deaths and destruction of the nobility create a sense of rightness for Denmark through Hamlet’s spiritual reassessment, moral reconciliation and multiple deaths.**

**2001 AP Question:** One definition of madness is “mental delusion of the eccentric behavior arising from it.” But Emily Dickinson wrote:

Much madness is divinest Sense—  
To a discerning Eye—

Novelists and playwrights have often seen madness with a “discerning Eye.” [In *Hamlet* show how] a character’s **apparent madness or irrational behavior** plays an important role. Then write well-organized essays in which you explain what this delusion or eccentric behavior consist of and how it might be **judged reasonable**. Explain the significance of the “madness” to the work as a whole.

Thesis (possible):

**Without question, Denmark is a mad, mad, mad world and surviving there requires an “antic disposition” to live amongst them: Hamlet’s apparent madness, therefore, not only seems reasonable, but necessary in this rotten kingdom.**

Other Topic Options

1. Is Hamlet truly mad or is he pretending to be mad for the sake of keeping his promise to the ghost? Explain Hamlet’s actions and the results of his actions. How do people look at him?
2. Explain Hamlet’s delay and why he takes so long to avenge his father’s death.
3. Explain Hamlet’s obsession with death.

4. In this play, the sins committed are sins of passion, but not all are of the same degree. Some are serious, others almost trivial. Explain the distinction. How does this distinction help account for the feeling of closure at the end of the play?
5. Research the three contemporary opinions about ghosts. The first has to do with their place of origin-hell or purgatory. Is purgatory good or bad? The second opinion about the nature of ghosts maintains they are sent by the devil to damn a person's soul. The third opinion explained that excessive melancholy could result in the appearance of spirits. After researching the three different opinions on ghosts choose one to explain the ghost of King Hamlet.
6. Explain the relevance of the possible, "Oedipus Complex," in relation to Gertrude and Hamlet.
7. Explain Hamlet's treatment of the women in his life and why he treats them so cruelly.
8. Explain the relationship between Fortinbras and Hamlet. Cite a specific passage.
9. How does "conscience...make cowards of us all relate to Hamlet's inability to act? Is Hamlet a coward?
10. Any other **pre-approved** topic is acceptable.

DUE DATE: Monday, December 18th  
50 points