

Essay Topics for Hamlet

1. The structure of drama is sometimes based on the principle of action followed by reaction. Cite examples in Hamlet of a character's own actions backfiring or reacting against him—a pattern that the Greeks called nemesis.
2. Relate Hamlet's mental development to the meaning of the play.
3. How does the question of appearance and reality affect the meaning of the play?
4. Shakespeare's greatest tragedies have moments of low comedy. Is comedy as serious a commentary on life as tragedy?
5. Our editor, Bernard Lott, (New Swan Shakespeare, Essex: Longman, 1990) on page ix says, "Hamlet lives and is significant today primarily because his experience...stirs the awareness of similar experiences in ourselves...Hamlet, placed in his own peculiar predicament, is shown responding to it in ways which are totally familiar to our own deepest natures." Do you agree or disagree? Why?
6. How do characters in the play change? From the following list choose **two** and trace the changes in their characters and account for these changes. Hamlet, Laertes, Claudius, Gertrude Ophelia
7. Emotion, reason and fate (i.e. time and accident) are key aspects of what happens in the play. Discuss how these elements interact to create tensions in the play and the role each plays in determining events in the play.
8. There are political and ethical dilemmas in the play; some apply only to Shakespeare's time, but many other are universal. Discuss the dilemmas and why they belong only to the Renaissance or why they belong to all times.
9. Discuss the leitmotif (recurring imagery) of nature in the play and how the constant references to nature and to blemished (faulty) nature enhance the meaning of the play.
10. In the final analysis, is the stratagem of feigned madness necessary to Hamlet's purposes? If you are of the opinion that the "antic disposition" is not necessary to Hamlet's purposes, why then did Shakespeare add the element of feigned madness to the play?
11. The introduction and excerpts from noted literary critics, especially Coleridge, Bradley and Eliot, account for Hamlet's delay in taking action. What are some theories that account for Hamlet's procrastination of his "duty" to revenge his father?
12. After all of your reading, thinking and discussion, who finally, **is** Hamlet? There is no right answer to this question but there **are** well-reasoned and well-supported answers.
13. Setting: In Act 1, what figurative or symbolic images of apprehension, sickness, decay and disorder does Shakespeare use in order to introduce the overall concept of personal and political corruption in Denmark.
14. Setting: What does Shakespeare accomplish dramatically by beginning the last act in a graveyard?