11 AP Literature and Composition

Mrs. Wolf

Hamlet by William Shakespeare

Due: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

As we read, discuss, and analyze the text of Hamlet together in class, consider your thoughts on these key aspects. Write notes in the text based on our reading and our class discussion. I expect you to write well-supported, quality answers to submit for a grade. Include examples from the reading, thoughtful analysis, and honest opinions in your responses. Responses should be about 5-8 sentences.

1. In what ways does the opening scene of the play set the tone for what follows? What atmosphere is established? Why are the sentries on guard so tense?
2. What are your thoughts regarding Gertrude? What are some reasons for her quick marriage to Claudius? Respond to her behavior toward her new husband (former brother-in-law) and her son.
3. What are your thoughts on Polonius? Do you see him as a fool, an overbearing and inquisitive father, a trusted advisor, or a selfish and arrogant man? What do you think of his advice and treatment of his son, Laertes? What are your reactions to how he treats his daughter, Ophelia? Respond to the decisions he makes regarding both of his children.
4. Do you think the ghost of King Hamlet can be trusted? What do you think of the information he revealed to his son, Prince Hamlet? Although the ghost demands his son to avenge his death, Hamlet does not take immediate action to seek that revenge. What do you think of Hamlet’s delayed response? What do you think of his strategy to change his behavior so as not to be accountable for his actions?
5. Reflect on Hamlet’s “To be or not to be” speech – arguably the most famous lines in all of English literature. What is going on in Hamlet’s mind? What is he considering? Respond to the range of emotions he goes through during this significant moment.
6. Discuss the relationship between Hamlet and Ophelia. What do you think of Laertes and Polonius warning Ophelia to stay away from Hamlet? What do you think of Hamlet’s treatment of her, especially during the spy scene in Act 3?
7. Toward the end of Hamlet’s “Mousetrap” play, Claudius rushes out, clearly bothered by what he sees. What causes this reaction? What do you think of Claudius’ confession? Why doesn’t Hamlet take action when he has the chance?
8. What are your thoughts regarding Rosencrantz and Guildenstern? Are they loyal to their friend Hamlet or to Claudius and Gertrude? Do they deserve what happened to them at the end of the play?
9. When Hamlet returns from his trip to England, we see him contemplate death yet again as he expresses his thoughts to Yorick’s skull. What are his thoughts on life and death at this point? What do you think of his behavior in the cemetery? What do you think of his actions throughout the play in his quest to avenge his father’s death?
10. Shakespeare creates a contrast between two sons, both set on avenging important deaths in their families. What are the differences between Laertes and Hamlet? What are the similarities between them? Respond to their decisions, actions, and character qualities.
11. What is the purpose of Horatio? He initiates little or no action: why is he there throughout the play?
12. Overall, what do you think of Prince Hamlet? How would you describe him? Does he deserve our sympathy or do you find him frustrating? Does he change or mature by the play’s end? Why has he endured as literature’s most brilliant character?
13. Develop a literary argument response that includes a clear thesis statement with evidence from the text to support the argument. Include at least two quotes and original analysis to show understanding of the play.