QUESTIONS FOR FISHBOWL DISCUSSION ON *HAMLET*

Please take detailed notes on the following 8 questions. You should find AT LEAST two quotations from the text for EACH question in order to support your arguments. Your notes should be in COMPLETE sentences in PARAGRAPH form. Think of each question as a mini-essay. Your responses should be between 300 and 500 words FOR EACH QUESTION (can be longer). **Please EMBED and CITE these quotations based on act, scene, and line numbers (for example: I.i.1-10)**. Your notes should be TYPED and turned in to ItsLearning by TUESDAY, 2/13 at 11:59 PM. Please ALSO bring a HARD COPY at the beginning of class on WEDNESDAY, 2/14. YOU MAY NOT WORK TOGETHER. THIS IS A **MAJOR GRADE** AND SHOULD BE COMPLETED INDIVIDUALLY. This time around, your preliminary notes will be a major grade, while your discussion portion will be a quiz grade. Your handwritten notes during the discussion will be part of your discussion grade. You must participate AT LEAST three times in a MEANINGFUL manner based on the rubric in order to earn full credit. The discussion portion will take place on Wednesday, 2/14, and Thursday, 2/15. (If these dates change due to freak bell schedule alterations – as we all know can happen here – I will let you know as soon as possible.)

1. Existentialism is a Modern philosophical movement that embraces many doctrines but centers on the analysis of individual [existence](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/existence) in an unfathomable universe. Furthermore, it focuses on “the plight of the individual, who must assume ultimate responsibility for acts of free will without any certain knowledge of what is right or wrong or good or bad” (dictionary.com). More basically, it focuses on the all-encompassing responsibility one has for his own actions. Hamlet, as a character, is considered by many – T.S. Eliot and Jean-Paul Sartre included – as an original existentialist. Is this supported in the text? If so, how can you argue that Hamlet is an existentialist? You may want to do more research on existentialism in general to back up your ideas (Sartre is an excellent example of an existentialist: many consider him the founder of existentialism as a philosophy). Make sure you reflect on Hamlet’s “To be or not to be” soliloquy. If you do not consider Hamlet an existentialist, support your argument through textual evidence, as well.
2. According to Sigmund Freud, the revolutionary psychoanalyst, Hamlet suffered from an Oedipus complex. How could you support this idea based on the text? Look at this from multiple angles, considering that Claudius has become his surrogate father. Building on this idea, consider and discuss other potentially incestuous feelings that are alluded to throughout the text (EXCLUDING Gertrude’s and Claudius’). How could you argue that this is a theme? What could have been Shakespeare’s **point** through its inclusion? Support your ideas.
3. Issues of sex are consistently referenced throughout the play. Although Hamlet often speaks in an explicitly sexual manner to Ophelia, one could assume that both Hamlet and Ophelia die with their virginity in-tact. One could further argue that, out of those who die in the final scenes, they are the ONLY characters who die as virgins. Why could you argue that Laertes does not? If this is true, how could it be supported through the text? If you don’t agree with any of these assertions (Ophelia’s and Hamlet’s virginity, any concept of virginity versus sexual experience as a theme), please still discuss the sexual themes that run rampant throughout the play. What is Shakespeare’s purpose through his themes of sexuality and restraint? Consider multiple characters’ involvement here.
4. “Metafiction” refers to writing reflecting on writing (either another person’s writing or the author’s own writing) (dictionary.com). How could *Hamlet* be considered a highly metafictional/meta-textual play? In other words, expand on Shakespeare's language regarding letters, books, and the play within a play in order to dissect his commentary on his own play. For example, Polonius’ comment that the player’s soliloquy is “too long” (II.ii.509). What could Shakespeare be saying (in a tongue in cheek manner) about drama and entertainment, and even the written word in general, especially concerning his own work?
5. Why do you think that *Hamlet* is still considered “mandatory reading” for both high school and college English courses? How can teenagers still apply elements of *Hamlet* to themselves, and what value can they find in the text regarding both the language and the content? More broadly, what kind of influence has *Hamlet* had on our society, culture, and media today that reinforces its significance? Reflect on “Act V” from *This American Life*: how has *Hamlet* impacted these inmates, and why do you think that *Hamlet* resonates in a different way after listening to this podcast? Instead of two cited quotations from *Hamlet*, please paraphrase **two different scenarios** presented in the podcast and discuss how the play and its themes functioned in this unique story. Please bring up anything else you found thought-provoking within this podcast, as well: I’m highly interested in your response and feedback, and you may use a more personal approach in this response in conjunction with your analysis.
6. Discuss the role that gender plays amongst these diverse characters: what is the INFLUENCE of gender on the characters? For example, Ophelia’s influence on Hamlet, Polonius’ influence on Ophelia, Gertrude’s influence on Hamlet, etc. How does Shakespeare comment on gender stereotypes through his portrayal of Gertrude and Ophelia? Why are men given multiple soliloquys, and women are typically portrayed through their actions and what they say to other characters? How is masculinity represented in this play, and what do you think Shakespeare’s purpose is regarding the definition of masculinity? Also consider suicide: how are Hamlet’s suicidal tendencies different from Ophelia’s ultimate end? How could you contrast Ophelia’s suicide with other Shakespearean suicides, like Juliet’s (deliberate suicide via dagger after Romeo’s stupid death) or Portia’s (swallowing hot coals after Brutus, her husband, flees Rome after murdering Caesar; she believes he will be killed by Octavius and Mark Antony)? **Why** is Ophelia’s suicide different?
7. How do the characters’ responses to supernatural events add to character development and major themes? Consider the fact that the Ghost appears to the guards and Hamlet, yet none of the other characters see him. How could you interpret this symbolically? How could it be argued that Shakespeare is commenting on Christianity or organized religion in general through *Hamlet* ‘s supernatural elements? Does Hamlet reinforce religious doctrine or contradict it? How is religion used to justify the characters’ unjust actions? Consider the characters’ questioning of both supernatural and purely religious elements and their planning or lack of planning before pursuing their actions; compare and contrast these elements in order to enhance your understanding and discussion of *Hamlet* specifically.
8. Discuss the final act of the play. What is the importance behind Hamlet’s famous “Alas, poor Yorick!” speech? (5.1.185-219) Analyze it based on the allusions he implements and the major points he’s trying to make. What is the significance of Horatio’s responses throughout this scene? Look at Hamlet’s final response during the duel scene: analyze his language in comparison or contrast to the way he has spoken throughout the play. Really dig deep here and make an argument for whether or not Hamlet is a tragic hero who follows the cycle (good nobleman, has one tragic flaw that leads him to making a crucial mistake, downfall, recognition of his mistakes – but also a recognition that it’s too late to fix them, death). If he isn’t a tragic hero, what does that mean? What is Shakespeare’s overall purpose behind this play? Finally, what Fortinbras’ importance throughout this play, from beginning to end?

YOU MUST RESPOND TO THESE QUESTIONS THOROUGHLY AND COMPLEXLY. YOU MUST ADDRESS EVERY ASPECT OF EACH QUESTION THOUGHTFULLY TO EARN FULL CREDIT. I WILL BE GRADING THEM WITH SCRUTINY, AND I *WILL* TAKE OFF POINTS FOR CITATION AND EMBEDDING ERRORS.

PLEASE REMEMBER TO PUT THE **WORD COUNT** AT THE BOTTOM OF EACH RESPONSE.

**DO NOT POST THE QUESTIONS ON ITSLEARNING. I ONLY NEED THE NUMBER OF THE QUESTION WITH YOUR RESPONSE. I WILL TAKE OFF FIVE POINTS AUTOMATICALLY IF YOU INCLUDE THE QUESTIONS WHEN YOU SUBMIT.**

**-5 POINTS (DISCUSSION GRADE): NO DISCUSSION RUBRIC TURNED IN**

**-10 POINTS: NO HARD COPY ON WEDNESDAY**