

***HAMLET* – TO BE, OR NOT TO BE... - A PUZZLING QUESTION**

Overview

In this lesson, the students will delve into Hamlet's soliloquy to de-code the text for meaning and insights and challenge them to think creatively.

Grade
Level

Subject
Area

Curriculum Expectations and Learning
Outcome

Time
Needed

Space

Materials

7-12

English,
Drama

Describe different approaches used to explore the text's concepts and themes;

Analyse the text focusing on the ways in which they communicate information, ideas and influence the listener's response;

Make meaningful connections between themselves and what they encounter in the text and the world around them.

1-2
class
Periods

Desks in groups, then open spaces for exploring the text

Attached handouts of Activities

For the Teacher

Brainstorm:

- ◆ Ask the class the following:
 - Think about a situation recently where you were attempting to do something but it failed, or something happened that made you feel frustrated and angry.

Options~

- [If the students don't want to share their thoughts with you or the rest of the class, have them do this assignment.] Write about this experience and how you felt for one minute, non-stop. If you get stuck write, "I felt...", as a prompt to help you.
- [If you want students to discuss this in class, have them work in pairs and do this assignment.] Find a partner and share your story with your classmate.

The Activity:

- ◆ Read the "To be, or not to be..." soliloquy or play an audio recording for the class to hear.
- ◆ Discuss what they heard and what they thought it was about.
- ◆ Divide the class into 6 groups. Place numbers 1 to 6 in a hat and have a representative from each group come up and retrieve a number. Distribute the "Student Worksheet" handouts to the students and let the students know that the number they have been given represents the numbered section of the soliloquy that they will be working on, going through the activity step-by-step.

STEP 1:

- ◆ Each group will read their section 2 to 3 times and, using the glossary, discuss the meaning of the words and phrases.

STEP 2:

- ◆ One person starts reading and every time there is any kind of punctuation mark, switch reader, and so on.

Questions~

- What did you discover about this section of the soliloquy?
- What is your reaction to Hamlet's thought process so far?

STEP 3:

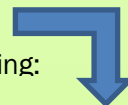
- ◆ The students will read their section again and mark where they think Hamlet has a change of thought, a realization, a decision, or something else they may have noticed.
- ◆ Have them write a title for every section that sums up what they think it is about.

STEP 4:

- ◆ The students will re-write their section using contemporary English.

PAUSE AND REVIEW:

- ◆ Have the students check out the following:



BREAKING DOWN THE SPEECH

Look at the whole speech:

⇒ How many lines are in this speech?



⇒ How many separate thoughts are in this soliloquy (Clue : each thought finishes with an end-stop punctuation of either a period, exclamation mark or question.).

⇒ How many of the thoughts end mid-line?

⇒ How many of the thoughts are questions?



⇒ Glance at the end of each thought – does it tell you what the speech is about?



Use these to further analyze the speech:

- ✓ Speeches with many thoughts signify a mind that moves quickly.
- ✓ Speeches with longer thoughts shows a mind more settled.
- ✓ Speeches with mid-line endings indicate a frantic mind, switching from subject-to-subject, almost as if they were interrupting themselves.

Food for Thought!

Consider the following statement:

“Hamlet’s speeches can be seen as a series of one-sided discussions with his best friend, the audience....

To be, or not to be... The meaning of those six words, those simple monosyllabic sounds, has caused an enormous theatrical and academic debate. *To be* is positive, *not to be* is negative. It’s 1 or 0, life or death, Heaven or Hell, action or passivity....Is Hamlet considering suicide?....

Some read the speech as indecision over whether to kill Claudius or not, using the notion of life or death, or being and not being as a starting point (Claudius is, after all listening behind the arras – how much of this speech does he hear?).

Others link it to the previous *Rogue and peasant slave* soliloquy where Hamlet questions *Am I a coward?*, as later in this speech he tells the audience that *conscience doth make cowards of us all*...In other words, having heard the audience silently call him a coward, he returns with his reasons for not having sought his revenge, explaining that if the audience thought about life, death and mortality the way he did, they would equally be thought of as cowards....

Hamlet’s main concern seems to be the question of what happens to us after death. If he kills Claudius, and it turns out the new King is innocent of Old Hamlet’s death, then Hamlet’s revenge is a sin, cold-blooded murder, and if there is a Heaven and Hell, then he isn’t going to meet any angels.

If we, the audience, thought about life and death, mortality, had intelligence and conscience like Hamlet, and were fascinated by existential philosophy – well, it would make cowards of us, too.”

Ben Crystal, Hamlet: Before/During/After , Arden Shakespeare, Springboard Shakespeare, 2013, pp119-120.

STEP 5:

- ◆ Each group will dramatize their section with movement/physicality but not use any words (i.e. mime, or tableaux).

Question~

- What did you discover when you physicalized this?

- ◆ Each group will then act out their section using their own contemporary words they created. This can be done as a choral piece spoken together, or each student gets a section, etc.

Question~

- What did you discover when you put it in your own words?

- ◆ Each group will act out their section, this time using Shakespeare's words.

Question~

- What did you discover when you used Shakespeare's words?

STEP 6:

- ◆ Have the class stand in a circle in numerical order with each group clearly clumped together.
- ◆ Have each group present once through their section of the soliloquy to the whole class.
- ◆ Repeat again and this time, as soon as one group finishes, the next group begins (only group 4 may wait to enter for 2 beats to complete the iambic pentameter).

Questions~

- What did you "hear" and discover as you did this activity?
- What do you think worked or should be added to the soliloquy?
- What clues did you find in the text that helped you stage your section?
- What did you discover about Hamlet?

Optional Written Assignment:

- ◆ Have the students write a 1-page advice on or opinion column to Hamlet. Have them use particular passages from the text to support their advice or opinion(s).

STUDENT WORKSHEETS: HAMLET'S "TO BE, OR NOT TO BE..." SOLILOQUY

Listen to the soliloquy being read.

***Hamlet* – Act III, scene 1**

To be, or not to be: that is the question -
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them. To die, to sleep -
No more; and by a sleep to say we end
The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to - 'tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wished. To die, to sleep -
To sleep, perchance to dream. Ay, there's the rub,
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come,
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
Must give us pause. There's the respect
That makes calamity of so long life,
For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,
The pangs of disprized love, the law's delay,
The insolence of office, and the spurns
That patient merit of th' unworthy takes,
When he himself might his quietus make
With a bare bodkin? Who would fardels bear,
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
But that the dread of something after death,
The undiscovered country from whose bourn
No traveller returns, puzzles the will,
And makes us rather bear those ills we have
Than fly to others that we know not of?
Thus conscience does make cowards of us all,
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
And enterprises of great pith and moment
With this regard their currents turn awry,
And lose the name of action.

Hamlet's Soliloquy in Six Easy Steps!

Each group will focus on their assigned section.

Read and follow the instructions in the guided STEPS.

Grp	Section of the Soliloquy	Glossary & Notes
1	To be, or not to be: that is the question - Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer The <u>slings</u> and arrows of <u>outrageous</u> fortune, Or to take <u>arms</u> against a sea of troubles, And by opposing end them.	slings - hurled missiles outrageous - excessively wicked, violent, cruel arms - weapons
2	To die, to sleep - No more; and by a sleep to say we end The heart-ache and the thousand natural <u>shocks</u> That flesh <u>is heir to</u> - 'tis a <u>consummation</u> Devoutly to be wished.	shocks - violent blows; clashes with enemy is heir to - inherits, experiences consummation - ending
3A	To die, to sleep - To sleep, perchance to dream.	
3B	Ay, there's the <u>rub</u> , For in that sleep of death what dreams may come, When we have <u>shuffled off</u> this <u>mortal coil</u> , Must give us <u>pause</u> .	rub - obstacle shuffled - cast off mortal coil - earth } died pause - pause for thought or ending
4	** There's the <u>respect</u> That makes calamity <u>of so long life</u> , For who would bear the <u>whips and scorns</u> of time, The oppressor's wrong, the <u>proud man's contumely</u> , The pangs of <u>disprized</u> love, the law's delay, The insolence of <u>office</u> , and the <u>spurns</u> That <u>patient merit of th' unworthy takes</u> , When he himself might his <u>quietus</u> make With a <u>bare bodkin</u> ?	** - wait two beats before beginning in order to complete the iambic pentameter started on the last line of 3B respect - aspect, consideration so long life - continue for so long whips and scorns - the hurts proud - poor contumely - humiliating insults disprized - unvalued office - people in authority spurns - kicks patient merit of th' unworthy takes - merit often goes unrecognized by unworthy people quietus - release of death bare bodkin - mere/unsheathed dagger
	Who would <u>fardels</u> bear,	fardels - burdens bound - boundary, frontier

5	To grunt and sweat under a weary life, But that the dread of something after death, The undiscovered country from whose <u>bound</u> No traveller returns, <u>puzzles</u> the will, And makes us rather bear those ills we have Than fly to others that we know not of?	puzzles – bewilders, confounds
6	Thus <u>conscience</u> does make cowards of us all, And thus the <u>native hue of resolution</u> Is <u>sicklied o'er</u> with the pale <u>cast</u> of thought, And enterprises of <u>great pith and moment</u> With this regard their currents turn <u>awry</u> , And lose the name of action.	conscience – consciousness, awareness of right and wrong native hue of resolution – natural determination to act sicklied o'er – unhealthily covered, hampered cast – shade of great pith and moment – of considerable scale and importance awry – mistakenly, wrongly, erroneously

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