



Hamlet Socratic Seminar



Preparation:

In preparation for this seminar, please find specific quotes and develop thoughtful preliminary opinions/questions pertaining to at least five of the *Hamlet* questions below with supporting evidence prior to the seminar. I will expect to collect at least one full page of notes from you on the day of the seminar. Those without notes will observe and take notes during the seminar, but will not contribute their opinions or questions. You will receive participation credit for your original thoughts as well as your responses to others in your group. Observers may receive half credit for the seminar by actively listening and taking notes while others discuss.

Be aware that an open mind is the best way to approach these seminars.

Expectations for Discussion:

- Participate but don't dominate and try not to just repeat ideas.
- Use evidence and specific examples from the text.
- Always have your book out during a Socratic Seminar.
- Direct your comments to other students, not to the teacher. I am only a facilitator.
- Take notes!
- Ask Questions! After all that is why we call it a "Socratic" Seminar. Questions often lead us to new and interesting places.

Questions:

1. Did Hamlet really go crazy? How does this connect to his wavering between action and inaction? Why doesn't Hamlet just kill Claudius? Is he a just man who needs assurance beyond a doubt of Claudius' guilt? Is he unable to take action because the opportunity never presents itself? Is he simply a coward? What are Hamlet's true motivations for even pursuing the murder of Claudius? Is it Fear? Revenge? Love? Loyalty/Obligation?
2. Is order restored and does justice prevail at the end of the play? Does the story of *Hamlet* make an argument for or against revenge?
3. Describe Hamlet's relationship with Ophelia. Did Hamlet really love Ophelia? Is he to blame in her death? Was it suicide?

4. What is the significance of Ophelia's madness? Why include it? What does it represent?
5. What did Gertrude know? Did she know what Claudius had done from the beginning? Did she figure it out later? If so, when? Or was she clueless until the end?
6. Who is at fault for the play's concluding events? Was this ending unavoidable? How much responsibility for the tragedy are you willing to place on Hamlet? Claudius? Gertrude? Ophelia? Rosencrantz and Guildenstern? Horatio? Why?
7. Was Hamlet an honorable person, less than honorable, or somewhere in between? What Hamlet a moral and ethical person? Is there a difference between being honorable and being moral? Was Hamlet justified in his pursuit for revenge? At the end of the play, Fortinbras states, "Let four captains bear Hamlet like a soldier to the stage, for he was likely, had he been put on, to have proved most royal..." Do you agree? Why or why not? Is Hamlet a true tragic hero? A tragic hero wants to do good, means to make things well, but is ultimately flawed. What are Hamlet's flaws? Does he allow his passions to overrule his reason?
8. Hamlet famously declares, "something is rotten in the state of Denmark." Is something rotten in the state of Denmark? If so, what precisely is it? Is Hamlet's "revenge" more than simply the killing of the king? Could it be that he is purging all the rottenness in the Danish court? Or is Hamlet contributing to the decay of Denmark? Is Hamlet a Noble Prince in a corrupt and evil world? Or a death-infected source of the rottenness in Elsinore?
9. As we discussed before reading, *Hamlet* is often considered a play of questions. What do you believe is the dramatic question for the play? Where is the corresponding climax of the play? There are many questions in this play that have been quoted over time, especially during times of moral dilemma. Find three such lines/questions, other than "To be or not to be..." and discuss their context within the play as well as how you think the question/dilemma should be resolved.
10. Why is this one of Shakespeare's most famous plays? Do you believe it should be considered one of Shakespearean's greatest works? Why or why not?

Post Reflection:

These reflection questions are to be answered after the seminar.

1. What lasting idea will stick with you from the Socratic?
2. What did you think of the Socratic Seminar? List one thing you liked and one thing you disliked. What can be changed/improved? Would you want to do this again?