

Name: _____ Class: _____

'To Be Or Not To Be' Soliloquy

By William Shakespeare
c. 1599

William Shakespeare (1564-1616) was an English poet, playwright, and actor, widely regarded as the greatest writer in the English language and the world's pre-eminent dramatist. Hamlet is one of Shakespeare's most famous tragedies. The play dramatizes the revenge Prince Hamlet is instructed to enact on his uncle Claudius, who murdered Hamlet's father. In this soliloquy from Act III, Scene I, a despondent Prince Hamlet contemplates death and suicide while waiting for Ophelia, his love interest. As you read, make notes about the way Shakespeare describes life and death.

- [1] **HAMLET:** 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
- [5] And by opposing end them. To die, to sleep —
No more — and by a sleep to say we end
The heartache, and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to. 'Tis a consummation¹
Devoutly to be wished. To die, to sleep —
- [10] 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 calamity² of so long life.
- [15] For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
Th' oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely³
The pangs of despised love, the law's delay,
The insolence⁴ of office, and the spurns
That patient merit of th' unworthy takes,
- [20] When he himself might his quietus⁵ make
With a bare bodkin?⁶ Who would fardels⁷ bear,
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
But that the dread of something after death,
The undiscovered country, from whose bourn⁸



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1. completion (of life)
2. **Calamity (noun):** a misfortunate disaster
3. insulting language or treatment
4. **Insolence (noun):** rude and disrespectful behavior
5. something with a calming or soothing effect; death
6. a sharp dagger or knife
7. burdens

- [25] 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
- [30] Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
And enterprise of great pitch and moment
With this regard their currents turn awry
And lose the name of action. — Soft you now,
The fair Ophelia!⁹ — Nymph,¹⁰ in thy orisons¹¹
- [35] Be all my sins remembered.

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8. boundary
9. Ophelia is the love interest of Hamlet in the play.
10. Nymphs are beautiful mythological spirits of nature.
11. prayers

Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which of the following best states a theme of the soliloquy?
 - A. Suicide is not only tragic but morally wrong, and should be discouraged.
 - B. When life is full of pain and struggle, it is worthwhile to end one's life rather than suffer.
 - C. It is better to take one's own life rather than take another's in the name of revenge.
 - D. Life is full of struggle, but the great unknown of death is far more fearsome.

2. PART B: Which of the following quotes best supports the answer to Part A?
 - A. "To die, to sleep — / No more — and by a sleep to say we end / The heartache, and the thousand natural shocks / That flesh is heir to. 'Tis a consummation / Devoutly to be wished." (Lines 5-9)
 - B. "For who would bear the whips and scorns of time, / Th' oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely / The pangs of despised 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" (Lines 15-20)
 - C. "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?" (Lines 24-27)
 - D. "And thus the native hue of resolution / Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought, / And enterprise of great pitch and moment / With this regard their currents turn awry / And lose the name of action." (Lines 29-33)

3. PART A: How does Shakespeare use figurative language to talk about death?
 - A. Shakespeare compares life to a nightmare and death to peaceful sleep.
 - B. Shakespeare compares life to crossing into new countries and death to being in a fixed state.
 - C. Shakespeare compares life and death to battles in which one has the choice of fighting.
 - D. Shakespeare compares death to sleep and dreams to the afterlife.

4. PART B: Which TWO quotes from the text support the answer to Part A?
 - A. "'tis nobler in the mind to suffer / The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" (Lines 2-3)
 - B. "take arms against a sea of troubles / And by opposing end them." (Lines 4-5)
 - C. "and by a sleep to say we end / The heartache, and the thousand natural shocks / That flesh is heir to." (Lines 6-8)
 - D. "For in that sleep of death what dreams may come / When we have shuffled off this mortal coil, / Must give us pause." (Lines 11-13)
 - E. "That patient merit of th' unworthy takes, / When he himself might his quietus make / With a bare bodkin?" (Lines 19-21)
 - F. "But that the dread of something after death, / The undiscovered country, from whose bourn / No traveller returns" (Lines 23-25)

5. How does Hamlet's conclusion on the question of "To be or not to be" develop the reader's understanding of his character?
