



# Hamlet Analyzing Hamlet's "To Be, or Not to Be" Soliloquy

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The line "To be, or not to be?" is perhaps one of Shakespeare's most recognizable and repeated lines. But the soliloquy that begins with this line reveals so much more about the theme of uncertainty than this one famous line can present.

To better understand the full power and meaning of Hamlet's words, analyze his entire soliloquy found in Act 3, scene 1. First, read the soliloquy. Then respond to the prompts in the chart. Be sure to use proper citation when required.

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,  
5 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 heartache and the thousand natural shocks  
That flesh is heir to—'tis a consummation  
10 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  
15 That makes calamity of so long life.  
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  
20 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,  
25 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,  
30 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.  
35 (No Fear: 3.1.57–89)



<b>Organization</b>	Identify at least one important organizational or structural element in the soliloquy. Consider how the lines are organized, the rhyme scheme, the meter, or how one idea moves to the next.
<b>Conflict</b>	Identify and explain the conflict being presented in the soliloquy. Is the conflict internal, external, or both? How does the conflict impact the speaker?
<b>Tone</b>	Identify the tone of the soliloquy. Explain the character's attitude toward the subject and/or his current situation. Provide specific language that helps create the tone.
<b>Resolution and Shifts</b>	First, identify what Hamlet claims to be the resolution to the conflict. Then identify a shift in his tone, syntax, and diction. Write a sentence describing the shift.

<b>Theme</b>	<p>Explain what the text reveals about the theme of uncertainty. How is the universal idea of uncertainty presented in each section? Cite at least one line from each section to support your response.</p>
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RL.11-12.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

RL.11-12.2 Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.

RL.11-12.3 Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).

W.11-12.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

W.11-12.10 Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.