

Questions to help annotation of Hamlet's soliloquy in Act 3 Scene 1

1. What do you think Hamlet means when he says, 'To be or not to be, that is the question'?
2. In what way is this similar to the opening of his first soliloquy when he said, 'Oh that this too too sullied flesh would melt, / Thaw and resolve itself into a dew'?
3. Why do you think Hamlet refers to a 'sea of troubles' rather than just saying he's got a bit of bother?
4. What does Hamlet call death? Underline or highlight all the instances of the word and then consider why Hamlet says it so often. What significance might it have?
5. What is it, according to Hamlet, that stops people welcoming death?
6. What is the 'mortal coil'?
7. In what ways does Hamlet seem less anguished in this soliloquy than in the first? Think about his subject matter and the way he expresses his thoughts.
8. How many questions does Hamlet ask in this soliloquy and what are they about?
9. What does Hamlet mean when he says, '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 pitch and moment / With this regard their currents turn awry / And lose the name of action.'?
10. Look back through your annotations on this soliloquy and explain how you might use evidence from this speech in your essay on Hamlet's character and state of mind. Start to think about how you might compare Hamlet's words and behaviour here to earlier in the play (particularly the other soliloquies we have studied). Do you notice any change in Hamlet or is he as bewildered, depressed and indecisive as at the opening of the play?