

3. Analyzing Soliloquys

A soliloquy is essentially a monologue or speech delivered by a character all alone—with exception—on stage. The purpose of the soliloquy is to enable Hamlet to share his inner feelings, thoughts and plans for the future, and therefore, develop the plot.

The soliloquy accomplishes this by using one or all of the following approaches:

- 1). Expressing Inner Conflict:** the playwright can inject dramatic tension in to the play by sharing the player’s innermost thoughts. For example, in the play *Hamlet* the main character of the same name describes himself in the following self-deprecating terms, e.g. “That I, son of a dear father murder’d,/Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,/Must, like a whore, unpack my heart with words” (II.ii.558-560). Hamlet knows he needs to act; however, he is upset with himself because he keeps finding excuses to vacillate and not take action.
- 2). Pursuing the Answer to a Rhetorical Question:** a rhetorical question is one in which a statement is implied in the asking. For example, picture a parent or care giver walking in to your messy room; they tell you to clean your room but you do nothing but continue to wallow in your wonderful filth. There’s a dramatic pause and then they say to you, “Do you think this room is just going to clean itself?” They aren’t asking a question. They are actually making a point, i.e. you need to clean your room *now*. In *Hamlet* the main character ponders his mortality by asking the rhetorical question “To be, or not to be” (III.i.57). Hamlet doesn’t ask this question in order to answer it; rather, Shakespeare puts the query in the player’s mouth because it provides Hamlet with an opportunity to contemplate aloud for the benefit of the audience.
- 3). Arguing Both Sides of an Internal Debate:** ethical decision making is a big part of any dramatic production because it helps develop the character and plot. In *Hamlet* the depressed prince asks “Whether ‘tis nobler in the mind to suffer/The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,/Or to take arms against a sea of troubles” (III.i.58-60).
- 4). Characters Describe How They View Themselves:** when a character speaks to themselves we are given opportunities to see how they view themselves. For example, Hamlet describes himself as a day-dreaming coward when he says “Am I a coward?...I,/a dull and muddy-mettled rascal, peak,/Like John-a-dreams, unpregnant of my cause,/And can say nothing” (II.ii.539-541).
- 5). Characters Describe How They View the World:** the soliloquy provides the audience opportunities to look out the same window and perceive the world just as they do. For example, when Hamlet says “How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable/Seem to me all the uses of this world!” (I.ii.133-134) the prince reveals his depressive view of reality to the audience.

Outcome: CR B 30.4

Read and demonstrate comprehension of a range of contemporary and classical grade-appropriate informational and literary (including novels) texts from various international, including indigenous, cultures and analyze the philosophical, ethical, and social influences that have shaped information, issues, characters, plots and themes.

6). **Figurative References:** Shakespeare made frequent use of allusion, metaphor, simile, alliteration, and dramatic irony. Allusions, in particular, provide interesting opportunities for character development and contrast, etc. For example, Prince Hamlet compares Lord Polonius with the biblical figure Jephthah. In so doing, Hamlet is implying Polonius, like Jephthah, was someone willing to sacrifice his daughter to satisfy his own selfish interests.

Hamlet:

O Jephthah, judge of Israel, what a treasure hadst thou!

Polonius:

What a treasure had he, my lord?

Hamlet:

Why,

'One fair daughter and no more,

The which he loved passing well.'

Polonius:

[*Aside*] Still on my daughter.

Hamlet:

Am I not i'the right, old Jephthah?

Polonius:

If you call me Jephthah, my lord, I have a daughter

That I love passing well.

In addition to drawing conclusions about the speech's overall significance to the play's theme (or one of the motifs), there are several other types of conventions students could take note of while analyzing and appreciating a soliloquy.

Blank Verse: is the piece written in unrhymed verse, e.g. iambic pentameter.

First Person Point of View: using I, me, my, myself, methinks, etc. or some other convention.

Imagery: the creation of word pictures, e.g. compare the statement "What you are saying is unpleasant for me to hear" with "These words are razors to my wounded heart."

Assignment Objective: to provide students with opportunities to discuss, appreciate and analyze two of the seven soliloquys found in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

Procedure:

- 1). Divide in to groups of two or three.
- 2). Read the soliloquy from beginning to end as a group.
- 3). Re-read the soliloquy and identify the specific approaches, e.g. expressing inner conflict, etc. employed by Shakespeare.
- 4). Discuss the significance, context or meaning behind these approaches, i.e. all the explanations above are essentially exemplars for you to follow.

- 5). Repeat steps 2-4 for the second soliloquy.
- 6). Be prepared to discuss your insights with the class (write down some of your thoughts in the space provided).
- 7). Complete the attached group-assessment rubric and submit it to your instructor. Be honest with your appraisal of your performance.

Soliloquy #1

'Tis now the very witching time of night,
When churchyards yawn, and hell itself breathes out
Contagion to this world: now could I drink hot blood,
And do such bitter business as the day
Would quake to look on. Soft! now to my mother. —
O heart, lose not thy nature; let not ever
The soul of Nero enter this firm bosom:
Let me be cruel, not unnatural;
I will speak daggers to her, but use none;
My tongue and soul in this be hypocrites, —
How in my words somever she be shent,
To give them seals never, my soul, consent!

Soliloquy #2

Now might I do it pat now he is praying,
And now I'll do it, and so he goes to heaven.
And so am I revenged, that would be scanned.
A villain kills my father; and for that,
I, his sole son, do this same villain send to heaven.
O, this is hire and salary, not revenge.
He took my father grossly, full of bread -
With all his crimes broad blown, as flush as May.
And how his audit stands, who knows save heaven?
But in our circumstance and course of thought,
'Tis heavy with him, and am I, then, revenged;
To take him in the purging of his soul,
When he is fit and seasoned for his passage?
No.
Up, sword, and know thou a more horrid hent:
When he is drunk asleep or in his rage;
Or in the incestuous pleasure of his bed;
At gaming, swearing or about some act
That has no relish of salvation in it.
Then trip him, that his heels may kick at heaven,
And that his soul may be as damned and black
As hell, whereto it goes. My mother stays,
This physic but prolongs thy sickly days.

Understanding & Analyzing Shakespeare			
	Fair (1)	Good (2)	Excellent (3)
<p>Identifying Approaches</p> <p><i>Identify by name the different approaches used in the soliloquy</i></p>	-group was only able to identify one approach to soliloquy creation	-group was only able to identify two approaches to soliloquy creation	-group was able to identify at least three approaches to soliloquy creation
<p>Discussing Approaches</p> <p><i>Summarize and discuss what we believe the soliloquy is about</i></p>	<p>-only partial understanding of approaches achieved</p> <p>-group members left studying the soliloquy feeling vague and uncertain</p>	<p>-good understanding of approaches achieved</p> <p>-group members left studying the soliloquy feeling somewhat sure they understood <i>most</i> of the approaches identified</p>	<p>-exceptional understanding of approaches achieved</p> <p>-group members left the soliloquy feeling they had attained an exceptional understanding of <i>all</i> approaches identified</p>
<p>Questions</p> <p><i>Group members asking one another questions for clarification and discussion questions</i></p>	<p>-questions asked show <i>little</i> high level thinking skills or analytical thought</p> <p>-questions asked reveal <i>little</i> understanding of the play</p>	<p>-questions asked show <i>some</i> high level thinking skills or analytical thought</p> <p>-questions asked reveal <i>some</i> understanding of the play</p>	<p>-questions asked show high level thinking skills or analytical thought</p> <p>-questions asked reveal <i>significant</i> understanding of the play</p>
<p>Analysis</p> <p><i>Group members use technical terms, etc. through the course of their discussion, e.g. allusion, pursuing an answer to a rhetorical question, etc.</i></p>	<p>-the soliloquies are <i>not</i> completely analyzed (some approaches are missed or poorly covered)</p> <p>-little evidence the text has been adequately studied or that concepts have been effectively utilized</p>	<p>-the soliloquies are <i>adequately</i> analyzed (some approaches are missed or poorly covered)</p> <p>-it is evident the text has been studied well and understood and the various applicable concepts have been utilized effectively</p>	-the soliloquies are analyzed <i>exceptionally</i> well in all respects