

AP English Literature and Composition

Unit 4: Hypocrisy, Veracity, Façade

FRQ 3 thematic analysis of *Othello*, *Heart of Darkness*, and/or *The Poisonwood Bible*

1. In *Contending Forces*, Pauline Hopkins asserts, “And, after all, our surroundings influence our lives and characters as much as fate, destiny or any supernatural agency.” Choose a novel or play in which cultural, physical, or geographical surroundings shape psychological or moral traits in a character. Then write a well-organized essay in which you analyze how surroundings affect this character and illuminate the meaning of the work as a whole.
2. Palestinian American literary theorist and cultural critic Edward Said has written that “Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted.” Yet Said has also said that exile can become “a potent, even enriching” experience. Select a novel, play, or epic in which a character experiences such a rift and becomes cut off from “home,” whether that home is the character’s birthplace, family, homeland, or other special place. Then write an essay in which you analyze how the character’s experience with exile is both alienating and enriching, and how this experience illuminates the meaning of the work as a whole. Do not merely summarize the plot.
3. In many works of literature, a physical journey—the literal movement from one place to another—plays a central role. Choose a novel, play, or epic poem in which a physical journey is an important element and discuss how the journey adds to the meaning of the work as a whole.
4. The most important themes in literature are sometimes developed in scenes in which a death or deaths take place. Choose a novel or play and write a well-organized essay in which you show how a specific death scene helps to illuminate the meaning of the work as a whole. Avoid mere plot summary.
5. Writers often highlight the values of a culture or a society by using characters who are alienated from that culture or society because of gender, race, class, or creed. Choose a play or a novel in which such a character plays a significant role and show how that character's alienation reveals the surrounding society's assumptions and moral values.
6. Novels and play often recount the moral or psychological development of the protagonist, highlighting the character’s recognition of his or her place in the world. Select a single pivotal moment in the moral or psychological development of the protagonist of such a work. Then, write a well-developed essay that analyzes how that single moment shapes the meaning of the work as a whole.
7. Novels and plays often depict characters caught between colliding cultures—national, regional, ethnic, religious, institutional. Such collisions can call a character’s sense of identity into question. Select a novel or play in which a character responds to such a cultural collision. Then write a well-organized essay in which you describe the character’s response and explain its relevance to the work as a whole.

For each topic, rewrite the prompt as a series of questions, delineating each task you need to accomplish in your essay.

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