

AP English Literature and Composition
Midterm study guide

We have read *Hamlet*, *Anna Karenina*, and “The Dead,” and you’ve either read or seen *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*—the test will center around these four texts.

To study for the exam, you should refresh your understanding of the fundamental sequence of events in the texts, important characters and themes; know that the texts will be handled in proportion to our attention to them. Go through the study questions for *Hamlet* and *Anna Karenina* to make sure you are conversant with the literary terms there and that you remember important events and ideas.

Question A. You will be given one essay that mimics the form of the AP test’s free response question; you will need to use either *Hamlet* or *Anna Karenina* as your base text for that essay.

Question B. The other essay will be one of the following two prompts. You should prepare both, as only one will appear on the exam:

1. Death in life. James Joyce, in “The Dead,” shows us the play of death in life through the characters of Gabriel and Gretta as well as the Morkans. As Anna experiences her downfall, she becomes willfully dead to some truths she must inevitably face; in her own life, Gertrude seems similarly willfully blind. Hamlet’s despair serves to deaden him to the people around him and the human cost of his actions and inaction. In a darkly comic way, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are conscious of the inevitability of death, and their actions, too, are colored by the consciousness of how “there’s only one direction.” How does this theme of death in life shape three of the texts in which it occurs? To compose your answer, look closely at passages that suggest this theme.

2. “The play’s the thing.” In *Hamlet*, Hamlet sets up a situation that causes Claudius to reveal his past actions through an emotional response. The horse race is a parallel scene in *Anna Karenina*. The music of Bartell D’Arcy elicits a memory in Gretta. How do these moments of truth affect the other characters in the stories and the plots of or other turnings in the stories? What do similarities and differences in the responses of Gabriel, Karenin, and Hamlet show about their own characters?