

AP English Literature
Practice Free Response Prompts for the Midterm

These are sample questions to inspire you to think through potential discussions of *Anna Karenina* and *Hamlet*. On the test, you will need to use one of those texts to answer the question given. These are actual questions from past AP tests. The question I give you will not be one of these, but thinking through how you would quickly make an outline and answer will help you know how to approach the actual exam question. (Thinking through what other works you might use, beyond our two target works for this test, is also good practice for the AP exam.)

1. Many works of literature contain a character who intentionally deceives others. The character's dishonesty may be intended to help or to hurt. Such a character, for example, may choose to mislead others for personal safety, to spare someone's feelings, or to carry out a crime.

Choose [*Hamlet* or *Anna Karenina*,] in which a character deceives others. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze the motives for that character's deception and discuss how the deception contributes to the meaning of the work as a whole. Do not merely summarize the plot.

2. In some works of literature, past events can affect, positively or negatively, the present actions, attitudes, or values of a character. Choose a novel or play in which a character must contend with some aspect of the past, either personal or societal. Then write an essay in which you show how the character's relationship to the past contributes to the meaning of the work as a whole. Do not merely summarize plot.

3. In great literature, no scene of violence exists for its own sake. Choose [*Hamlet* or *Anna Karenina*] and show how it confronts the reader or audience with a scene or scenes of violence. In a well-organized essay, explain how the scene or scenes contribute to the meaning of the piece.

4. In [*Hamlet* or *Anna Karenina*] some of the most significant events are mental or psychological; for example, awakenings, discoveries, changes in consciousness. In a well-organized essay, describe how the author manages to give these internal events the sense of excitement, suspense, and climax usually associated with external action.

5. In literature, often a character who appears briefly, or does not appear at all, is a significant presence. Write an essay in which you show how such a character functions in the work. You may wish to discuss how the character affects action, theme, or the development of other characters.

6. The British novelist Fay Weldon offers this observation about happy endings: "The writers, I do believe, who get the best and most lasting response from the readers are the writers who offer a happy ending through moral development. By a happy ending, I do not mean mere fortunate events—a marriage or a last minute rescue from death—but some kind of spiritual reassessment or moral reconciliation, even with the self, even at death." Choose [*Hamlet* or *Anna Karenina*] and, in a well-written essay, identify the "spiritual reassessment or moral reconciliation" evident in the ending and explain its significance in the work as a whole.

7. One definition of madness is "mental delusion or the eccentric behavior arising from it." But Emily Dickinson wrote: "Much madness is divinest Sense—/To a discerning Eye—" Novelists and playwrights have often seen madness with a "discerning Eye." [In *Hamlet* or *Anna Karenina* show how] a character's apparent madness or irrational behavior plays an important role. Then write a

well organized essay in which you explain what this delusion or eccentric behavior consists of and how it might be judged reasonable. Explain the significance of the “madness” to the work as a whole.

8. 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.