



BOOKS/LITERATURE

“Rosencrantz and Guildenstern”

Fareez Giga
Stanford University

“ROSENCRANTZ AND GUILDENSTERN ARE DEAD” IS an astounding, intellectually challenging, and humorous concoction. Stoppard cleverly captures the characters of Hamlet, written by Shakespeare, but creates somewhat of a comic tragedy. Clearly an oxymoron, but profoundly effective. The play focuses on the story of Hamlet, but from the viewpoint of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and it also takes the theories proposed in Hamlet and presents them in a comic, rather than sullen, manner. One of the most humorous scenes is when Rosencrantz, or Guildenstern, since the distinction is never truly made between the two, is laying on a table and thinking to himself what it is like to be “dead in a box.” This scene proves to be hilarious, despite its deep meaning, and parallels the infamous “To be, or not to be” speech in Hamlet. Life’s unanswerable questions are constantly being asked throughout the play, but by inserting these dubious inquiries within a comedy, Stoppard is able to captivate and preserve his audience’s attention. In fact, the humor provides the wiring, which connects the



messages of the play to our own chaotic existences. This brilliant literary work captures the essence of a tragedy within a comedy, something only few authors can accomplish. It is able to provide profound, theoretical ideas that have long been questioned into a comic perspective, and yet keep its integrity.

ANALYSIS

In just one short paragraph, Fareez engages with the literary work “Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead” in a lively and creative manner. Early on, the essay pinpoints the “oxymoron” of the tragicomedy form, giving us a theme of contrasts that runs throughout the short essay response. Fareez demonstrates his familiarity with the work by highlighting a specific scene from the play. This is more effective than a summary; considering the limited space provided, a summary would take up too much space and could also seem too general. The subsequent analysis of this scene shows that Fareez is an active interpreter of the literary work, as well as an avid reader of other plays, as shown by the analogy he draws to Hamlet. Through the description and analysis of one specific scene, Fareez addresses a broader issue: the “intellectually exciting” aspects of literary work that the essay prompt asks him to explain.

The reference to “life’s unanswerable questions” implies that these are the types of deep philosophical inquiries that Fareez himself participates in. He might have chosen to be more explicit about this, thereby linking his analysis of the play more directly to his own life. This would help address the “explain why” aspect of the essay question in greater detail. It is always important to address all parts of an essay question to show that you have read the prompt mindfully and given it careful consideration.

This essay relates to Fareez’s other essay, “A Dramatic Coup” (Chapter 16), in that it describes his passion for drama and theater. Some students choose to write on completely different topics for their various essays, especially if they have a diversity of interests. However, it is also appropriate to focus on a particular passion or interest, especially if you plan on pursuing this in college or are applying to a special program in a school and wish to demonstrate your dedication to a specific field such as science, music, or service. Writing more than one essay on a specific passion/interest runs the risk of sounding redundant, so this approach may be more useful for shorter essays. In Fareez’s case, he was able to demonstrate in “A Dramatic Coup” that he is a dedicated actor, and also show that he is able to approach theater from a more intellectual and philosophical angle in “Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.” Read together, these two essays give us the sense