**Hamlet symposium**

Main objective of hamlet is revenge

Act 4 sc 3 - he could not be further from achieving his objective as he watched fortinbras army march towards war.
"Dull revenge"

"What is a man?...." Is the mystery at the heart of hamlet - he has the cause and the motive to do it but hasn't done it

Humanism of hamlet - seen in Hamlet & Horatio - they are humanists who above all seek to preserve the sanctity of life. Seat of humanism in Europe was Wittenburg University where Hamlet & Horatio attend. in this speech he moves away from humanism towards a more existential / nihilistic character who moves to a much bleaker outlook
The question in his heart in this moment is about his revenge.

iSIS / Bin Laden / Syria / Iraq / All revenge and vengeance acts that are still the stuff of our six o'clock news - still very relevant - righting of a great wrong through violent means. Can this be carried out by someone with a modern, academic man? "am I a beats or am I a man?"

Form = Revenge tragedy play.
Content = the way the form is packaged.

Tragedy: is an experience that an audience goes through. A live art form with a moral lesson about human suffering. Through external preparation is the main focus the threat is internal, tragedy teaches us that the enemy is within - you are the biggest problem in your life, we cause the most major obstruction to our own lives.

Four elements of tragedy: fate, free will (tension between the two), fatal flaw or problem within a character that will define a character and their destruction (transgenerational tragedy where whole family lines are wiped out) , moral responsibility despite the right and wrong, or the right and the more right.

Metaphor of Denmark arming itself about an external threat that never comes, and by the time it wanders in at the end, Denmark is destroyed from within.

Horatio is the image of balance in the play "nothing too much"

Hamlet is defined by an excess of rashness and an excess of guilt, and he falls apart. He is a truth seeking missile - anyone that lies tomHamlet dies

Context:
- Elizabethan world of uncertainty, terrible disillusionment and uncertainty from international and domestic military threat
- end of Elizabeth's reign with no successor.
- Police state under totalitarian regime full of spying and surveillance where things were built to be out of proportion and a culture of fear is established.
- growth in education and diversity of philosophy and the emergence of humanism.
- conflict between religions
- theatre as powerful art form.

Metatheatrical elements reflect the power of theatre at the time.

Hamlet is a living, breathing metaphor for the uncertainty of Elizabethan England, and this is why is is still relevant today as our world has never been more uncertain.

Shakespeare's sources - Saxo Grammaticus - The Amleth Saga (Viking story)

Shakespeare wants the play to be ambiguous and uncertain, he wants the audience to have more questions than answers.

Ambiguities and tension are the play's strength because they allow choice in the way you answer your question.

Loyalty to the patriarch
Loyalty to friend
Loyalty to monarch
Loyalty to self - Hamlet's loyalty to himself (very sophisticated)

Confusion of loyalty evident in the very opening scene - "Long live the King!"

Antithesis of themes is highlighted through the use of antithesis in language throughout the play (binary opposite ideas)

Think or act
Sanity or madness
Seeming or reality
Modern humanity or primal instinct
Love and fidelity or unfaithfulness
Prison or freedom
Life or death

Antithesis is the building block of Hamlet - there are over 2000 examples of antithesis in the play, and it helps to highlight his delay by creating conflict and tension and holds our engagement in the play.

Ros & guil's storyline is defined by loyalty, however it is housed with colloquialism and comedy. As lower status,mother speak in prose, not verse. They are loyal to the monarchy, their friend and to themselves.

Shakespeare deals with the notion of truth and the search for truth with within and without throughout this play - the truth must be sought on top of all things - this is fundamental to the play as a whole. The conclusion he makes is that the truth hurts, and is hard to deal with.

What holds Hamlet together from its beginning to this ending in performance

Fortinbras is an example of why this play is a failure, as the character appears ever so briefly and he finishes the play with a feeling that he is tacked on to the end of the play with no real meaning.

So, does this play achieve textual integrity? (A spine that holds it all together)

Many critics consider it rambling, too long, too ambiguous and there is too much delay and not enough action.

The perfect tragic arc to the fortinbras story is "O cursed spite, that ever I was born to set it right" - links to old Hamlet killing King Fortinbras on the day that young prince Hamlet was born. Links to ideas of fate and ideas of divine right to the throne being taken away and the must needs revenge of such a death.
When Fortinbras speaks at the end of the play he acknowledges that Hamlets whole life has been a debt to pay for the death of King Fortinbras - it is the circular arc if tragedy where sons revenge the deaths of their fathers over and over again. In this sense, Fortinbras is central to the meaning of the play.

4 revenging sons in the play, Hamlet, Laertes, Fortinbras and the player (Pihhrus)
Who, at least temporarily, all do nothing. This is reflected in the players reading of Pyrrhus lines in act 2 sc 2 as a metaphor for Hamlets inability to act - foreshadowing the chapel scene where Hamlet can't kill Claudius

Discuss significance of iambic pentameter and the switch out of it as important language technique.

The textual integrity is bound up in the image of the one son revenging his fathers death, and reflected in the other sons revenging their fathers deaths, and this is summed up in Fortinbras closing speech.

Dramatic use = form of the play, you must discuss how the evidence works in performance.

Reason and madness

The meta theatrical elements of the play within the play, it is about the roles we play and the masks we wear.
Hamlet continually speaks in terms of a play, it is a play that knows it is a play.

Characters who play roles / act a part for the benefit of others (Ophelia / Hamlet / Ros & Guil) and the irony lays in the fact that the only people Hamlet trusts are the actual actors in the play.

Real madness exists in Ophelia - although it is also a mask through which she is finally free to speak her heart, and in this regard, madness is a form of freedom. She breaks our heart because she is beyond understanding, she is childlike.

The play is about the masks we wear and the roles we play.

Hamlet's relationship with women:

Hamlet has an obsession with the sexual equation of the female - the enigma of female desire, and the dee seated mistrust that men have of women's sexuality - this is an enduring theme today.

Ask what do the women represent in this play? What might their dramatic function be?

Shakespeare subverts the revenge tragedy genre which is traditionally a a very male dominated genre of man hunting man who has done him wrong. Hamlet follows the rules of this on the surface, although it is subverted by having the man's focus of his obsessive disgust on what he feels is the greater crime of his mother's relationship and sexuality that he therefore condemns all women to a point of anonymity, and is a complete misogynist, Hamlet is trying to end the whole act of reproduction on planet earth " there will be no more marriage"

Gertrude and Ophelia both represent desire in this play - every scene that they are in is focused on their sexuality or their fidelity, or wrong doing in both. Hamlets relationship with Gertrude has poisoned his relationship with Ophelia.

Act 3 Sc 1 (hamlet and Ophelia as they are being spied on)

Use of Ophelia's blank verse is continually shut down by Hamlet, the rigid structure that Ophelia puts in place through the use if blank verse allows her to not slip up and say something that she shouldn't say - it highlights the formality, and the forced nature of her words. Hamlet's refusal to respond in blank verse is in opposition to this and he is laughing at her forced speech, especially as she begins to speak in rhyme which sounds forced and unbelievable.

This is built in the previous scene where he says "the lady shall say her mind freely or the blank verse shall halt for it." - he knows that Ophelia is lying to him.

Hamlet is charactised by a deep sexual shame.

Dual meaning of nunnery as a slang word for brothel is interesting when considering Ophelia's options and the nature of her relationship with Hamlet as a sexual relationship. This sexual relationship is further described in her mad song where she describes her going to him, this is a sign of the faith she has in him. She then goes on to sing about being tricked into sex under promise of marriage and then leaving her for being too easy. This is a way for Shakespeare to hide the nature of the relationship as it was illegal in context.

A true moment of ugliness for Hamlet "get thee to a nunnery"

When she goes mad, it is completely understandable given her circumstances.

Hamlets focuses and obsession with the women in the play is evident in the closet scene where his sole focus is on counselling his mother.