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Period 4

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Hamlet and Oedipus Essay

Nobility's Foibles: Hamlet vs. Oedipus as Tragic Hero

Introduction should get across the idea that there are five characteristics of a tragic hero and both Hamlet and Oedipus meet in some way. Your thesis should then explain that these characters meet some of the characteristics in the same way and others differently as well as the specific characteristics that will be analyzed in your essay.

Each of your body paragraphs should have a topic sentence (introduce one of the characteristics of a tragic hero and explain whether Hamlet and Oedipus show this characteristic the same way or differently). Then introduce how Hamlet meets the characteristic in one sentence. The next sentence should be a quote to prove that this is how Hamlet meets the characteristic. Then explain how this quote shows Hamlet meets the characteristic the way that you claim (note: this sentence should not begin with "this quote shows that" or any variation on this). Follow this with a transition into how Oedipus meets the same characteristic. Then use a quote to prove that this is how Oedipus meets this characteristic. The next sentence should explain how this quote shows that Oedipus meets the characteristic. Then you need a concluding sentence that wraps up the idea that each of the characters meets the characteristic the same or differently. The following is an example of a perfect body paragraph (I obviously don't expect perfection; however, the basic format should be followed):

One characteristic that both Hamlet and Oedipus meet in a similar way is that they recognize the consequences of their actions; both of these characters do terrible things in their plays, and before the end of the story they recognize that their tragic flaws have caused them to commit atrocious acts. Hamlet's tragic flaw is inaction, and he realizes that he has waited too long for his revenge when he sees that Fortinbras, Hamlet's foil, is willing to risk everything he has in a war over a worthless piece of land while Hamlet himself will risk nothing even for his beloved and murdered father: "Witness this army of such mass and charge, led by [Fortinbras]...exposing what is mortal and unsure to all that fortune, death, and danger dare,

even for an eggshell...How stand I then, that have a father killed, a mother stained...and let all sleep...O, from this time forth my thoughts be bloody or nothing worth!" (Shakespeare 4.5.47-66). When Hamlet sees Fortinbras' willingness to go into battle for such a worthless trifle, he feels completely ashamed that he has allowed Claudius to go unpunished despite having killed Hamlet's father and sullied his mother with a tainted marriage; thus, Hamlet recognizes before the end of the play that he has allowed corruption to continued unchecked in Denmark due to his own inability to act, his tragic flaw. Oedipus, on the other hand, tries to act to save his people; however, his tragic flaw, hubris, causes him to bring about the very prophecy he sought to thwart by denying the will of the gods, an impossible task. Oedipus flees Corinth upon hearing the dreadful prophecy that he will kill his father and marry his mother, hoping to escape such a terrible fate, showing that he feels he can outsmart the gods. Once Oedipus realizes what he has caused he "ripped from [Iokaste's] gown the golden brooches that were her ornament, and raised them, and plunged them down straight into his own eyeballs, crying 'No more...shall you look on the misery about me, the horrors of my own doing!...From this hour go in darkness'" (Sophocles 1178-9). Being blind to his own hubris leads Oedipus down a terrible path, and he gouges out his eyes once he recognizes the pain he has caused himself, his family, and the people of Thebes. Thus, both Hamlet and Oedipus recognize the consequences of the actions their tragic flaws cause them to perpetrate before the end of their respective plays.

Your conclusion should simply sum up the points made in your paper. Start by restating the characteristics of a tragic hero. Then restate your thesis. Then reiterate your compare point and support (For example, using the body paragraph I wrote the similarity sentence in my conclusion paragraph might be the following: Both Hamlet and Oedipus have a recognition moment. Hamlet realizes his own inaction when he sees Fortinbras march on Poland, and Oedipus realizes that he has caused the prophecy to come true due to his hubris and gouges out his eyes once he sees his mother's suicide.) Then reiterate your contrast point and support.

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