Whose Stage Is It?

Viewpoint, language, and literary influence in Hamlet

12.CL.1 "Read, analyze, and evaluate complex literary and historical texts written from particular points of view or cultural experiences, with an emphasis on works of literature from the British Isles. a. Read, analyze..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two details that show how Hamlet judges the ghost's claim, circle a quoted line from Shakespeare, and number two details that show how Stoppard changes the story's viewpoint.

A Prince, a Play, and Another View

1. In Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, a prince hears a ghost accuse his uncle Claudius of murdering his father. The ghost demands revenge, but Hamlet cannot simply test its story in a court of law. He arranges a performance resembling the murder and watches Claudius leave. Hamlet takes this reaction as evidence, yet the audience must judge how much a startled exit proves. Written for the stage in England around 1600, the play draws on a culture that debated ghosts, kingship, and revenge. Hamlet's viewpoint shapes the search for truth, but it does not settle it.

2. Shakespeare also gives Hamlet words that travel beyond the scene. Before weighing whether to endure suffering or face death, Hamlet asks, "To be, or not to be: that is the question." The line is often quoted as a quick way to describe a hard choice, although the speech considers a darker question than choosing between ordinary options. Later, Hamlet says, "The play's the thing / Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king." Here, theatre becomes a tool for investigation. Quoting either line without its setting can flatten a troubled character's reasoning into a neat slogan.

3. In Tom Stoppard's 1966 play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, two minor figures from *Hamlet* become the central characters. Shakespeare's courtiers are sent to find out what troubles Hamlet, but Stoppard lets the audience follow their confusion instead. This change does more than retell the plot: it asks what a royal story looks like to people who receive orders without knowing the whole plan. Stoppard's play relies on audiences recognizing Shakespeare's earlier one, while challenging its focus on the prince. Reading the plays together shows how a later writer can inherit a story and question whose perspective deserves the stage.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Hamlet treats Claudius's exit as evidence. Why might an audience judge that evidence differently?

2. How does the culture described in the first paragraph complicate Hamlet's search for truth?

3. How does using "To be, or not to be" for an ordinary choice change the line's meaning?

4. What does Stoppard's focus on the courtiers reveal that a prince-centered story might overlook?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a 75 to 100 word pitch for a new stage version of *Hamlet* told from Gertrude's viewpoint. Describe what she notices during the staged murder, explain how her viewpoint changes the audience's judgment, and give one Shakespeare line quoted in the passage a new meaning.

ANSWER KEY

Whose Stage Is It?

GRADE 12 · 12.CL.1

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two details that show how Hamlet judges the ghost's claim, circle a quoted line from Shakespeare, and number two details that show how Stoppard changes the story's viewpoint. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Hamlet treats Claudius's exit as evidence. Why might an audience judge that evidence differently?	**Claudius leaves during the performance, but a startled exit alone does not prove why he left or establish his guilt.**
2	How does the culture described in the first paragraph complicate Hamlet's search for truth?	**Debates about ghosts, kingship, and revenge make the ghost's demand a serious but uncertain claim. Hamlet must decide whether to trust it before acting against a king.**
3	How does using "To be, or not to be" for an ordinary choice change the line's meaning?	**It turns Hamlet's consideration of suffering and death into a simple slogan about choosing between options.**
4	What does Stoppard's focus on the courtiers reveal that a prince-centered story might overlook?	**It reveals the confusion of people who receive royal orders without knowing the whole plan, and it challenges the idea that only the prince's viewpoint matters.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

My version places Gertrude beside Claudius while Hamlet's actors stage the murder. She watches her son watch the king, but she cannot see what Claudius is thinking. When he rises, she wonders whether the scene exposed a killer or frightened a man who recognized an accusation. Hamlet calls theatre his trap: "The play's the thing." For Gertrude, the play is also a test of how quickly a family turns suspicion into certainty. Her limited view makes the audience weigh the exit rather than accept Hamlet's verdict.

Accept interpretations supported by the passage, especially those that distinguish Hamlet's inference from proof. For the pitch, check the word count and look for a Gertrude-centered scene, a changed audience judgment, and a contextual reinterpretation of a quoted line.