

***Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* by Tom Stoppard**

- There are many, many supportable yet conflicting interpretations of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, which is one of the reasons this play is as widely read and studied as it is.
 - The following writing prompts are meant to get you thinking about what some of these interpretations could be.
 - Remember, as with any text, there are both supportable and unsupportable interpretations. Be sure that the claims you make can be supported by a close reading of the entire text.
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1. **Existential Absurdity** is a clash or incongruity between us and the meaninglessness of the universe. This incongruity:
 - Has a cause that cannot be identified and as such is not solvable.
 - Is a clash that is seen in all aspects of our existence and cannot be isolated.
 - Causes despair and prompts us to question the meaning and purpose of life leading us to the ultimate question of, "Is life worth living?"

➤ Look at Hamlet's soliloquy in Act III Scene 1 Lines 64-96.

 - a. Identify the elements of absurdity in this speech.
 - b. Analyze how these elements, along with other literary devices, contribute to the meaning of the speech and to Hamlet's internal conflict.
2. *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* is NOT considered an **absurdist play**.
 - In the Theater of the Absurd, a work must tell the story of characters who are searching for order and meaning in a universe with no order or meaning.
 - While Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are searching for order and meaning, the universe they live in *does* have *both* order and meaning, even if Rosencrantz and Guildenstern can't deduce what that order and meaning is.

➤ While *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* is not an absurdist text, it does contain absurd elements.

 - a. Identify absurd elements of the play.
 - b. Analyze how each element contributes to the meaning of the plot.

3. **Aphorism**: a brief statement that expresses a general truth, astute observation, or opinion about life
"Failure to prepare is preparing to fail"
– Benjamin Franklin

➤ Find an aphorism in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*.

 - a. What is the meaning of the Aphorism.
 - b. Analyze how it supports the meaning of the play?
4. **The Play...Within a Play...Within a Play...**

➤ Think about the Player and the group of Tragedians.

 - a. What purpose do they serve in *Hamlet*?
 - b. What purpose do they serve in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*?
5. **Roger Ebert Said:**
The theatrical experience of "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern," which I saw in London during its first run in the 1960s, was an intellectual tennis game between playwright and audience, with Shakespeare's original text as the net. There was an audacity and freedom to the way Stoppard's characters lurked in the wings of Shakespeare's most perplexing tragedy, missing the point and inflating their own importance - they were the ants, without the rubber tree plant. The tension between what was center stage and what was offstage was the subject of the entire evening.

➤ Analyze the tension between what is off stage and what is on stage. Why is it important to the play?
6. The following are important motifs in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*:
 1. Identity
 2. Choice and Agency
 3. Coins
 4. Point of View, Perception, and versions of Reality
 5. Fate
 6. Questions and Answers

➤ Based on your group assignment, write about how that motif functions in the text.