

JEFFREY R. WILSON  
DEVELOPING YOUR ARGUMENT

**Objectives:** This activity is designed to help you develop your main argument—to see how far you can push it while adhering to the key criterion, *I believe this to be true*.

**Readings:** William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (ca. 1599)

**Instructions:**

1. Using the argument you've developed, ask yourself, *What is the truth that I've discovered?* What is the claim you can make about the text that satisfies the criterion, *I believe this to be true*? Complete this sentence with an interpretive (not merely factual) statement that reflects your argument:

It is true that, in *Hamlet*,

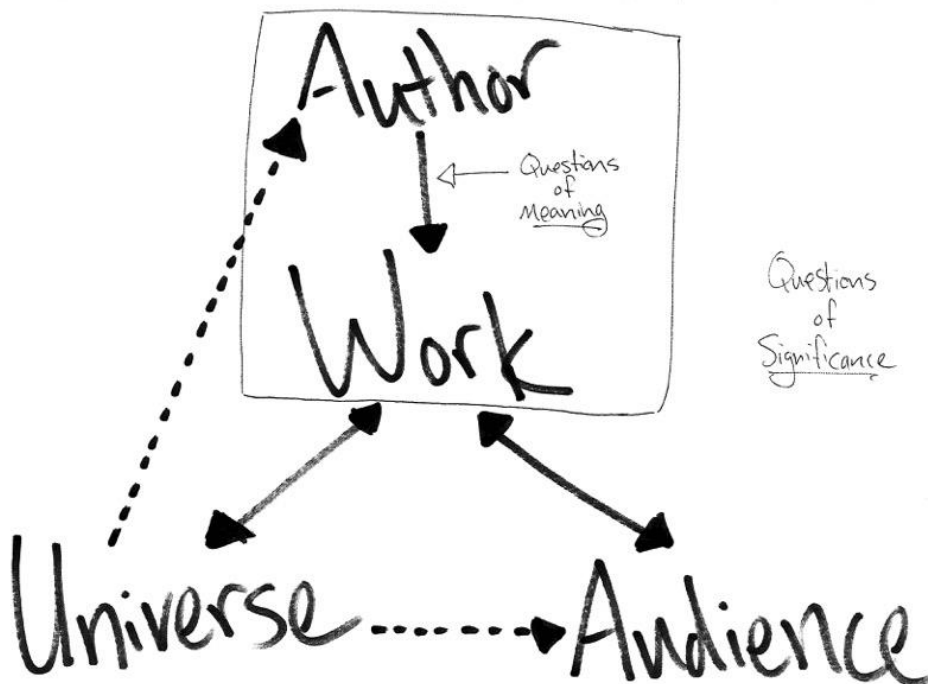
2. You've probably described an aspect of the text. Now let's see if you can push your interpretation a little further (sometimes you can; sometimes you can't). Start by asking how that thing you just described about *Hamlet* got there. Specifically, do you think Shakespeare deliberately put it there?

Yes

No

I Don't Know

**If you said yes, answer Question 3 (a and b). If no or I don't know, answer 4 (a and b).** Our diagram of "The Total Situation of the Work of Art" may be helpful to review.



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3. Questions of meaning (what did the author intend? how did [s]he do it? why?):
  - 3a. How did Shakespeare create the quality of *Hamlet* that you've described (as best as you can reconstruct his strategy while adhering to *I believe this to be true*)?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - 3b. The previous question (3a) was a *how* question: *how did he do it*? Now ask the *why* question: why did Shakespeare create the quality of *Hamlet* that you've described (as best as you can imagine what his motive might have been while adhering to *I believe this to be true*)?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. Questions of significance (what does the text point to? where does it come from? why is it important?)
  - 4a. Where did the quality of *Hamlet* you're describing come from? What forces brought it into existence? (You're speculating, yes, but adhere to *I believe this to be true*.)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - 4b. Describe the process through which that force / those forces resulted in the quality of *Hamlet* you're describing. (How far can you push things while maintaining, *I believe this to be true*?)