

JEFFREY R. WILSON  
SETTING THE STAKES

**Objectives:** This activity is designed to help students move from having an argument to understanding what's at stake in that argument.

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

**Instructions:**

1. Thinking about your *implications*, determine whether you envision your essay as a *close reading* (which unpacks some small aspect of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in an effort to enhance our understanding of the totality of Shakespeare's play) or a *theorization* (which unpacks something about Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in an effort to comment on some idea or issue outside of Shakespeare's play)?

A Close Reading

A Theorization

2. Based on whether you envision your essay as a *close reading* or a *theorization*, identify the academic discipline to which you're making a contribution with this essay. A discipline is a broad field of knowledge, the kind of thing you identify when you identify your concentration. (If you're doing a close reading, you're working in Literary Studies. If you're doing a theorization, you might be working in, e.g., Psychology, Environmental Science, Women's Studies, etc.)
3. Identify the field or line of thought within that discipline that you envision yourself making a contribution to (e.g., in Literary Studies, it could be Shakespeare studies, or tragedy studies; in Psychology, it could be studies of unconscious bias).
4. Now note that the *question/problem* that would be answered by your *implications* may not be the same as the *question/problem* that got you thinking about this argument in the first place (i.e., the question/problem posed in your first response paper). **Working backwards from your implications, identify the question/problem you now have an answer to.** This will probably be a bigger question related to the discipline/field in which you're writing, as opposed to the smaller, more local question you earlier posed which grew out of your analysis of Shakespeare's play. For the sake of clarity, it may be helpful to distinguish between a *Question<sub>1</sub>* (which is related to your *text* and *argument*: the issue in the text that needs interpretation) and a *Question<sub>2</sub>* (which is related to your *stakes* and *implications*: the issue outside your narrowly defined "text" illuminated by your interpretation).

*Question<sub>1</sub>* (answered by your *argument*):

*Question<sub>2</sub>* (answered by your *implications*):

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5. What *orientation* would you need to provide in an essay so that your reader can understand and appreciate the importance of your questions?

*Question1:*

*Question2:*

6. The final step here is to think about how you should *structure* your presentation of these two related questions (and the orientation needed for each) in your essay. Which does it make sense to pose first? How does each relate to your thesis statement? Should you pose only one or both questions in your introduction?