William Shakespeare – *Hamlet*

Test: Beginning of September

“There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so.”

Pre-reading study and post-reading analysis:

* Biography, William Shakespeare
* Two critical reviews of the play, printed and annotated, which come from a “scholarly” source. These should be read and annotated *after* you finish reading the play. I recommend the critical analysis of Harold Bloom.

Annotating the text:

* Annotate the descriptions of characters. Keep an ongoing dialogue with the text as major characters develop. Our analytical frame for this play is how we use characterization as a keyhole to view the themes and the meaning of the work as a whole.
* Highlight words which are unfamiliar even if they aren’t entirely unfamiliar. It’s Shakespeare, so a reasonable assumption would be to expect more “unfamiliar.” Re-write and define the terms at the top of each page.
* Keep track of the scenes in each act. Include a one-sentence summary at the end of each scene. You could imagine that the collection of these statements would well summarize and analyze the play.
* Identify significant quotations – dialogue, monologues, soliloquies, asides – which are clearly intended to communicate a broad message or thematic significance.
* Post-it notes will be used for examples of clear characterization and plot development. Develop multiple interpretations. Extend your learning and take chances on developing perspectives and insights even if you believe they are “risky.” Post-its should also mark significant, meaningful thematic elements.
* Use post-its to mark pages with repetitions, motifs, potential or identified symbols, rhetorical strategies, and significant passages. Consider alliteration, irony, paradox (very important), assonance/consonance, antithesis, simile/metaphor, personification, puns, synecdoche, understatement, allusion, antithesis, parallelism, asyndeton/polysyndeton (this especially), zeugma.
* Ask questions. Write questions which come with a reasonable guarantee of an answer “down river,” but use post-its when you develop questions whose answers will lead to major thematic explanations or questions worthy of asking a small group or the entire class or questions which would lead to deep discussion.

In your **composition** book open a series of pages which act first as a receptacle for three main items:

1. Record the unfamiliar terms and definitions from the tops of your pages.
2. Summarize each act.
3. Expound on three post-its. Look back at the post-its in your text. They should mark the pages of the chapter, act, or scene where you have identified points for critical analysis. While a minimum should never exist, you should choose three to five post-its for every section. Once you’ve identified these points, expound. Ask and attempt to answer deep questions about Shakespeare’s purpose and his intent. Your analysis should challenge your psychoanalysis of characters, broaden your understanding of symbols, illustrate the effects of Shakespeare’s style, sew the settings and places to thematic elements, map your insights even if the roads don’t have ends. Be prepared to compose an essay on one of these critical points of analysis.