

Literature and Film: Midterm Study Guide

On the midterm, you will answer two essay questions: one on *Hamlet* and one on “Ball of Fat,” “Last Stage to Lordsborg,” and “Stagecoach.” For each essay question, you choose two of the three works to analyze.

You may bring a list of characters for each work to the midterm.

Your essay must be clear, organized and reasonably correct grammatically. You should refer specifically to the written texts and movies (but **do not retell the story**). You may consult your list of characters but not the books or your notes.

Possible questions on *Hamlet*:

1. Shakespeare, Olivier, and Almereyda interpret the relationships of characters differently. Choose **one** of the following relationships; discuss how **two** of these three (Shakespeare, Olivier, Almereyda) present that relationship.
 - a. Hamlet and Ophelia
 - b. Hamlet and Gertrude
 - c. Gertrude and Claudius
 - d. Ophelia, Laertes, and Polonius
 - e. Hamlet and Horatio
2. . Shakespeare, Olivier, and Almereyda present the characters differently. Choose **one** of the following characters; discuss how **two** of these three (Shakespeare, Olivier, Almereyda) characterize that individual.
 - a. Hamlet
 - b. Claudius
 - c. The Ghost
 - d. Ophelia
 - e. Gertrude.
3. Discuss at least three differences between Olivier’s *Hamlet* and Almereyda’s *Hamlet* and the significance of those differences, that is, how they affect characterization, theme, etc.
4. In what ways does Olivier’s shooting in black and white and Almereyda in color affect their films?
5. Discuss the importance of setting, costuming, and/or lighting in Olivier’s *Hamlet* and Almereyda’s *Hamlet*.
6. Almereyda transforms Shakespeare’s Kingdom of Denmark into the Denmark Corporation. How does transforming the political significance of King Hamlet’s murder into an economic issue affect our interpretation of their films?
7. What are some of the primary differences between the Ghost in Olivier’s *Hamlet* and Almereyda’s *Hamlet*? What different effects do they produce?
9. For Olivier’s and Almereyda’s “Hamlet” which version do you believe stayed true to Shakespeare original script and why?
10. Do Shakespeare, Olivier, or Almereyda create the sense of inevitability which Aristotle says is necessary for tragedy?
11. Do Shakespeare’s Hamlet, Olivier’s Hamlet and Almereyda’s Hamlet meet the definition of the tragic

hero as a man of superior qualities with whom the audience can identify but who has a tragic flaw which leads to his death?

12. What positive or negative effects does the method of visual replacing the language in Almereyda's "Hamlet" have on the film versus the play?

13. A commonly held assumption is that literature deals well with interior thoughts and feelings whereas film deals best with appearances and surfaces. Does either Almereyda's or Olivier's *adaptation* of *Hamlet* bear out this statement? This question requires you to discuss Shakespeare's play and one of the two films.

14. What key elements did Olivier and Almereyda keep in their adaptations from the play, *Hamlet*, and how did these elements change, as they were adapted?

15. How would you compare the scene "alas, poor Yorick" (or another scene of your choice) in the Olivier and Almereyda interpretations?

16. How has Hamlet's relationship with his mother, Gertrude, been identified in the film adaptations of *Hamlet* (Olivier and Almereyda)? How have these characterizations shed light on the idea of an Oedipal relationship between them?

17. Having seen both Olivier and Almereyda's film adaptations of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, what elements of film have they used in order to tell their story without actually telling it (i.e. use of colors in costume, repeated images, film techniques, etc.)?

Possible questions on "Ball of Fat," "Last Stage to Lordsburg," and *Stagecoach*

1. Discuss ways in which Ford has adapted Haycox's short story, which is a medium that depends on language, into a film, which is a medium that depends largely on the image or the visual.

2. The action of *Stagecoach* is obviously based on Haycox's "Last Stage to Lordsburg"; however, Ford asserted that *Stagecoach* also derived from du Maupassant's "Ball of Fat." Discuss the similarities and differences between *Stagecoach* and **one** of the short stories and the significance of those similarities and differences.

3. Why is "Ball of Fat" a masterpiece and "Last Stage to Lordsburg" a piece of hack (i.e., second-rate) writing?

4. Discuss the role that social class plays in *Stagecoach* and "Ball of Fat."

5. How is society presented in *Stagecoach* and "Ball of Fat"?

6. How do the different endings (including the fate of Dallas and Ball of Fat and the attitudes of the other passengers) reflect a difference between Europe and America?

7. A major challenge in adapting a short story for a movie is the need to enlarge or expand the narrative. In what ways did Ford handle this challenge, with what results?

8. What makes "Last Stage to Lordsburg" a second-rate short story and *Stagecoach*, whose themes and characters are based on it, a masterpiece?