

Reader Response: Is *Henry V* Pro-War?

Essentially, you will be writing a 3-paragraph essay. You should have an introduction, body paragraph, and a conclusion. These reader responses will have the same exact rules as our formal essays. They will all take the form of an argument where you will have to take a stance and support that stance with quotes from the text.

Due: December 12th to Turnitin.com by 11:59PM

Worth: 100 Points - Intro and conclusion are worth 25 points. The body paragraph is worth 50.

Prompt:

We live in a society that seems to glorify war. History and media tend to be kind to those who have fought, and in some cases died, for our country. Shakespeare wrote ten plays about kings and their many exploits in battle. *Henry V* may be his finest History play. Look at the speeches and instances throughout the play and create an argument that addresses this question: Does *Henry V* promote war? Is a *Henry V* a pro-war play?

You may want to structure your essay this way:

Introduction- Obviously, introduce the topic of the essay. This is where you should also discuss the context of the essay. Discuss war in general. Introduce us to the writer and introduce the topic of the play. Be sure to have an open thesis at the end of your introduction.

Body Paragraph - Identify the most powerful reason that you feel this play glorifies war. OR argue your most powerful reason that this should not be classified as a “pro-war” play.

You need to take specific examples from the play and build your argument around these examples. Be sure to address the counterargument in the second half of each body paragraph. Be sure to also rebut the counterargument.

Conclusion- Revisit your thesis statement. Summarize your key points and relate what you are writing about to the big picture. Finish with a strong closing statement.

Henry V Sample Paragraph with Counterargument

(TS) Even though the play seems to promote peace and compromise in many places, because *Henry V* promotes “brotherhood” through battle, it should be viewed as a prowar text. (CD) In Henry’s famous St. Crispin’s Day speech he promotes “brotherhood” through battle when he exclaims, “We few, we happy few, we band of brothers; for he today that sheds his blood with me shall be my brother...” (4.3.62-64). (COM 1) Henry delivers this rousing speech right before his men enter into a battle that would seem a lost cause. His men are tired from a long march, sick and wounded from previous battles, and Henry needs to inspire them. The speech is a response to one of his noblemen wishing that they had more men to go into battle with them. (COM 2 & 3) The way Henry promotes brotherhood through battle is one of the most significant reasons that *Henry V* should be considered a pro-war text. Throughout the play, Shakespeare inserts moments where Henry sells his men on this war that even he needs prodding by the Archbishop of Canterbury to enter into. He sells the brotherhood through battle most inspiringly in this speech. War is not something that should be taken lightly, and Henry does not. But it should also not be something glorified by suggesting that the only way to enter into brotherhood with your countrymen is through shedding blood on the battlefield. This play is clearly selling war on many occasions, but none more blatantly than the St. Crispin’s Day speech. (PT) It could be argued that the play does not promote war, because earlier in the play Henry actually tries to avoid bloodshed. In his Harfleur speech he gives the French a way out when he tells them to (CD) “Take pity of your town and of your people, whiles yet my soldiers are in my command; whiles yet the cool and temperate wind of grace o'erblows the filthy and contagious clouds of heady murder, spoil and villany.” (3.3.29-32). (COM1 – **The is the part of the essay**

Your basic argument that builds on the evidence that you choose from the text.

(PT)
Transition to the counter.
Use a CD that supports the counter.

Counter-argument should be a fair discussion of the opposing side of

where you deal with the counterargument) *There are moments in the play where it would seem that Henry is trying at all costs to avoid war. In the Harfleur speech in Act 3, he is clearly trying to avoid bloodshed. He offers the men of the town a way to avoid conflict through negotiation. This can't be considered a pro-war play if the main character continually looks for a way to avoid confrontation. If this was a pro-war play, Shakespeare would have omitted this portion of his speech. He would also not have included the passage in Act 2 where Exeter visits the King of France and offers to let him give Henry what he wants in order to avoid war. There are also scenes in Act 4 where the play clearly has characters agonizing over the deaths of other characters. Sure, there are some speeches where Henry is trying to inspire his men, but there are more scenes where the play shows the horrors of war. **This is a very sound point; however, it does not mean that the play does not glorify war. If a score is being kept, the scenes in the play that glorify war outweigh the scenes where Henry is seeking a peaceful resolution without bloodshed. His entire justification for going to war in the first place is absurd. The whole Salic Law discussion is actually taken as a joke by the noblemen who are listening to Canterbury's explanation in Act 1. Canterbury even makes a joke about the Salic Law situation being "as clear as the summer's sun" (1.2.91). If his very reason for going to war, coupled with the many instances where he talks about the honor men gain from fighting in wars, does not make a case for this being a pro-war play, then there is no such thing as a pro-war text. This is a man who was known as "The Warrior King." He is celebrated for his ability to fight, and no history book does as much to glorify this military prowess as much as this play. (TRANS)** There are other scenes in this play that make it a pro-war play.*

Your rebuttal to the counter.

This should be about the same amount of text as the counter.