

Hamilton: Act II Discussion Questions
CP English 12

Choose 3 questions total to answer. The questions can be from any part! Questions are numbered; please include those numbers in your response.

Rubric:

- ___ 3-4 sentences minimum
- ___ makes a clear response to the prompt
- ___ shows a clear understanding of or connection to the musical
- ___ develops a complete idea
- ___ is written honestly but without offensive or biased words and claims

(Each response is worth 5 points)

Part 1

Songs: What'd I Miss, Cabinet Meeting #1, Take a Break, Say No to This, The Room Where It Happens

Discussion questions:

1. "The Room Where It Happens" points out that much of politics happens behind closed doors. How important is transparency in politics? We can connect this to our own time and place with Governor DeWine's promises to make the state government's actions visible to citizens during the COVID-19 crisis. **What are the benefits and ideals behind transparency? What are the drawbacks? List a benefit or a drawback and explain your thinking.** You can reply based on our current situation or based on the details from the song/musical.

Part 2

Songs: Schuyler Defeated, Cabinet Battle #2, Washington on Your Side, One Last Time, I Know Him

Discussion questions:

2. Several of the black performers in the musical have reflected on the challenge of depicting white slave owners like Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, and James Madison. They have also commented on the inclusive power of becoming a part of the story of the nation's beginnings, that it has made them feel more connected to a heritage that their ancestors were unable to take a part in. **How do you feel about people of color playing characters who oppressed and enslaved their ancestors? Do you think this is horrifying or empowering and why?**

3. The casting and music of *Hamilton* draws attention to the multi-ethnic face of America today. There has been a lot of conversation about people of color playing the parts of slave-owners and other historical people who participated in a culture of oppression. In addition, critics claim that some of the abolitionism claimed on behalf of these individuals has been exaggerated just to make us feel like the Founding Fathers were good guys. Interestingly, the creators of *Hamilton* ended up dropping "Cabinet Battle 3," which is a debate about the role of slavery in America and what the government should do about it. Listen to the demo or read the lyrics to the rap battle. **What do you think of the choice to drop this battle from the show? Do you think it would have been a distraction or felt like a digression? Or would it have offered a way to show the true attitudes of our Founding Fathers towards slavery?**

Audio: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1fh4Xh29zNk>

Lyrics: <https://genius.com/Lin-manuel-miranda-cabinet-battle-3-demo-lyrics>

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Part 3

Songs: The Adams Administration, We Know, Hurricane, The Reynolds Pamphlet

Discussion questions:

4. This section of the musical shows the ugliness of politics and power. **What do you think of the characters' actions in this section? Be as specific as you can. How do you think characters should have reacted to the situations they found themselves in?** Now is a good time to stop to reflect upon the fact that *Hamilton* is historical fiction . . . these are characters developed, not real human beings! Much of these thoughts and words are invention!

5. Hamilton is confident that writing will be his salvation once again when he writes the Reynolds Pamphlet. This question is an outside-the-text question: **is writing still powerful? Or have images replace writing as our most powerful form of communication?**

Part 4

Songs: Burn, Blow Us All Away, Stay Alive (Reprise), It's Quiet Uptown

Discussion questions:

6. These songs move from AH's political life to his personal life. They make me think of a quiz I took at the National First Ladies' Library in Canton, Ohio. By answering a series of questions, I was able to find my First Lady match (from a very small group of options). One question that made a decisive difference in my match was whether I would have my own politics or stand quiet behind my husband's politics and actions. I know Eliza isn't the First Lady, so this is not a clear parallel, but in this song she chooses to ERASE herself from the story. **What do you think of this choice? What do you think of Lin-Manuel Miranda's choice to characterize Eliza this way?**

7. I can't quite figure out how to phrase this next question, so I'm just going to write and hope you get it. Listening to these songs in the medium of rap and hip hop, I am struck by the parallel between the "honor" system of dueling and the "honor" system of violence in modern gangs. (I found some references to this line of thinking online, so I know I'm not just making something of nothing!) Moreover, the musical ("Blow Us All Away") suggests that Phillip learned this response from his father. **Do you think the musical glorifies or criticizes this type of honor code in which the individual seeks his or her own independent route to honor and glory rather than trusting legal channels and authorities?** Is it impossible to get away from this attitude in a country built by rebels? Is this part of our legacy from our fathers?

8. We haven't discussed the amazing lyrics or brilliant musicianship of the musical much. "One Last Time" stands out to me because I think it was a brilliant idea to use the words from Washington's actual farewell address and to make this a duet that reflects AH's career writing for Washington (AH helped write this farewell address, too.) I love the lines about the vine and the fig tree and "safe in the nation we've made." **What songs and lyrics stand out to you? Try to explain what you enjoy or appreciate about a song or its lyrics.** Choose anything from the musical's score!

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Part 5

Songs: The Election of 1800; Your Obedient Servant; Best of Wives and Best of Women; The World Was Wide Enough; Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Tells Your Story

Discussion questions:

9. "The World Was Wide Enough" may be about the antagonism between Burr and AH, but we can also draw a parallel to political conflict between liberals and conservatives, Republicans and Democrats, etc. in our own time. **IS the world wide enough? Can we have our own beliefs and values as well as allow others to have theirs?**

10. Eliza laments that her husband does not become one of the founding fathers whose story is told and retold as the myth of America's founding. Instead, her husband is relegated to the story of his duel with Aaron Burr. For many of us, *Hamilton* alone has given a greater (albeit fictionalized) context to AH's life. **Is there any danger in telling these individuals' stories as though they are (tragic) heroic characters rather than real, historical people?**

12. Eliza's final song shows that, after AH's death, she lived a long life involved in politics and social reform. In the song, Eliza describes this life as telling her husband's story, and she insists that he "could have done so much more." **Does this song challenge or recreate traditional ideas about women and their contribution to the world?**