The Nature and Use of Power

Much can be learned about the nature and use of power from reading and seeing Shakespeare’s plays. The use of power might be most obvious in his history plays (Richard II, Henry IV Parts I and II, and Henry V), but it is present in almost all human relationships, and hence, in the comedies and tragedies as well.

- Sociologist Max Weber defined “power” as “that opportunity existing within a social relationship which permits one to carry out one’s own will even against resistance and regardless of the basis on which this opportunity rests.” This includes both physical power and political power (or influence).
- One could also define “power” as the more or less unilateral ability (real or perceived) to bring about change in people’s lives through the actions of oneself or of others.
- One doesn’t “have power” alone; one needs to consider the other parties in the relationship.
- All parties to all relationships have some power.
- Power operates reciprocally. To control others, one must have control over the things that they desire or need, but one can rarely exercise that control without a measure of reverse control—larger, smaller, or equal—also existing.

Using the following prompts to guide you consider the behavior of not just the protagonists in Othello and Hamlet but also of other characters and give at least ONE GOOD EXAMPLE for each of the following.

BE SURE to identify the person and the situation in which their power is displayed. Don’t just drop a character’s name. Explain what he or she does.

Who holds power through…

1. Personal charisma:
   
   

2. Ascribed power (perceived abilities whether tested or not):
   
   

3. Expertise:
   
   

4. Persuasion:
   
   

5. Knowledge:
   
   

6. Money:
   
   

7. Force:
   
   

8. Moral persuasion: 

9. Application of non-violence: 

10. Group dynamics: 

11. Social influence of tradition: 