

Hamlet Study Guide Questions

Directions: Answer the following questions thoroughly on your own paper. Trust me when I say that you do not have enough room in the tiny amount of space after each question to respond with enough depth and detail to satisfy me.

Act 1

Scene 1

1. What conclusions can you draw from the first 14 lines of this play (list at least 5)?
2. How does the setting (time and place) of this opening scene affect the mood (atmosphere/readers' feelings)?
3. What is Horatio's initial reaction to reports of the ghost? What does that say about his attitude towards/relationship with the soldiers?
4. According to Horatio, what is the relationship between King Hamlet and Fortinbras? What is the disposition of young Fortinbras—what is he doing? Why?

Scene 2

1. How does Claudius speak? What kind of language and sentence structure does he use? What would you infer about his personality from the way he speaks?
2. To whom does Claudius send word to help with the troubles with Fortinbras?
3. What is Laertes' request of Claudius?
4. What is Hamlet's first line in the play? What does it say about his character, his feelings, and his relationship with his uncle?
5. What do Hamlet's lines, "But I have that within which passeth show--/ These but the trappings and the suits of woe" mean? What is his message to his mother?
6. This scene contains one of Hamlet's most famous soliloquies, beginning, "Oh that this too too sullied flesh would melt..." In this soliloquy what action does he consider, and against what does he rage?

Scene 3

1. About what does Laertes warn his sister Ophelia? What is his advice?
2. What is Polonius' charge to Ophelia?
3. What kind of language does Polonius use? What does his diction say about his character?
4. What are your impressions of Ophelia at this point? Why?

Scene 5

1. What does Hamlet learn from the ghost? (Details, please!)
2. About what does Hamlet make the others swear?
3. What is Hamlet determined to do?

Act 2

Scene 1

1. What does Polonius intend for Reynaldo to do?
2. Why is Ophelia afraid? What has she seen?
3. What does Polonius think is the cause for Hamlet's madness?
4. What has Polonius told Ophelia to do? Why does she do it? What do her actions say about her character and her relationship with her father?

Scene 2

1. What does Claudius ask Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to do?
2. What is their connection to Hamlet?
3. What is Claudius' concern with Fortinbras of Norway?
4. What does Fortinbras request through Voltmand?
5. What does Polonius tell Claudius and Gertrude about Hamlet?
6. What do Polonius and Claudius agree to do? (What's their plan?)
7. What does Hamlet try to get Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to tell him? How do they react? What does he say to them as a result? What does this exchange say about their relationship?
8. Explain how Hamlet's speech (2.2) reflects the Elizabethan Great Chain of Being.
9. For what does Hamlet upbraid/condemn himself?
10. What does he decide to do by the end of the scene?

Act 3

Scene 1

1. What is Hamlet's soliloquy, "To be or not to be," about? Use the given handout to explicate it. What does he fear?
2. Why do you think Hamlet treats Ophelia the way he does? Do you think he is truly mad? Support.
3. What does Hamlet say as a threat to the others?
4. How do Claudius and Polonius treat Ophelia?

Scene 2

1. What goes on between Hamlet and Ophelia during the play (within the play)?
2. How does Claudius react to the play?
3. How does Hamlet determine to treat his mother by the end of this scene?

Scene 3

1. What does Claudius commission Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to do?
2. What is Polonius going to do?
3. What does Claudius decide about his prayers and repentance?
4. Why does Hamlet not kill Claudius when he has the chance?

Scene 4

1. What happens in Gertrude's bedroom?
2. What does Hamlet tell Gertrude? What adjective best describes Hamlet's feelings as he talks to his mother?
3. What does he tell Gertrude to do—or not to do?
4. What does he tell her of his condition?
5. What does Hamlet know about the trip to England?

Act 4

Scene 1

1. What does Claudius tell Gertrude he is going to do about Hamlet?
2. What does Claudius send Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to do?

Scene 2

What does Hamlet tell Rosencrantz and Guildenstern they are like—what does he say is their relationship with the king?

Scene 3

1. Where does Hamlet tell them Polonius' body is? Discuss his explanation of the food chain.
2. What actual clue does he give them about the location of the body? Where is it?
3. What information/commission has Claudius actually sent to England?

Scene 4

1. What does Fortinbras ask of Claudius?
2. What does Hamlet think about Norway's battle against Poland?
3. What does Hamlet decide by the end of the scene?

Scene 5

1. What is Ophelia's state?
2. Why does Gertrude at first refuse to see her?
3. In what manner does Laertes enter the scene? What does he demand?
4. Why does Claudius not tell Laertes that Hamlet is to blame—in this scene? (consider the staging of this scene)

Scene 6

1. What does Horatio learn from Hamlet's letter?
2. What are your thoughts about Hamlet from his letter?

Scene 7

1. What two reasons does Claudius give Laertes for not pursuing Hamlet and bring him to justice for the death of Polonius?
2. What else does he tell Laertes about Hamlet's plans?
3. What plan (details) do Claudius and Laertes devise for the demise of Hamlet?
4. What new does Gertrude bring of Ophelia? (details)

Act 5

Scene 1

1. What are the clowns/gravediggers discussing?
2. What is the dramatic irony in this scene concerning Hamlet?
3. Hamlet constantly questions man's purpose in life—what specific questions/thoughts does he consider in the graveyard (especially with his thoughts on Yorick)?
4. What happens over Ophelia's grave?

Scene 2

1. What does Hamlet tell Horatio he found in the letter that went with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to England?
2. How does Hamlet change the orders?
3. How does Hamlet feel about what he has done?
4. How does Hamlet feel about Laertes?
5. What news does Osric bring to Hamlet?
6. How does Hamlet greet Laertes done to ensure their separate victories?
7. How does Laertes respond?
8. What have Claudius and Laertes done to ensure their separate victories?
9. Tally a body count—tell who dies, how, and by whose hand.
10. Who tells of the outcome?
11. List all references to acting and the stage you find in the last part of the scene (beginning with entrance of Fortinbras)