

Hamlet Study Guide questions

Act 1, Scene 1

1. What is happening as the play opens?
2. Who are Marcellus and Bernardo and what is “the thing” Marcellus asks Bernardo about?
3. Why has Marcellus brought Horatio with him?
4. Why is the castle being guarded?
5. What do Horatio, Marcellus and Bernardo decide to do as the scene ends?

Act 1, Scene 2:

1. This scene opens with Claudius addressing the court.
 - a. What does he say it is time to do?
 - b. What does he believe Young Prince Fortinbras may be planning and why?
2. Where does Claudius send Voltimond and Cornelius? Why?
3. Who is Laertes and what does he ask of Claudius?
4. How does Claudius respond to Laertes’s request?
5. What do Claudius and Gertrude want Hamlet to do (lines _____)?
6. In his first soliloquy, what does Hamlet reveal as his feelings towards his mother and Claudius? Identify at least two main points of his speech.
7. When Bernardo, Marcellus and Horatio find Hamlet, what does he plan to do as a result of what they tell him?
8. As the scene ends, why does Hamlet think the ghost of his father may be appearing?

Act 1, Scene 3

1. Who is Ophelia?
2. What advice does Laertes give Ophelia before he leaves?
3. What advice does Polonius give Laertes before he leaves? Identify 3 key points.
4. What does this advice tell us about Polonius’s character?
5. How does Polonius respond to the advice Laertes has given Ophelia and what request does he make of his daughter?

Act 1, Scene 4

1. What is everyone waiting for as this scene opens?
2. What is happening during the King and Queen’s celebration that includes a cannon?
3. What does Hamlet think of this custom and how does he fear it affects Denmark’s reputation?
4. When the ghost appears, what does Hamlet do?
5. How do the others react to what is happening?

Act 1, Scene 5

1. What does the ghost tell Hamlet he wants him to do?
2. What does Hamlet learn really caused his father’s death? What has everyone been told?
3. How does Hamlet respond to this new knowledge?
4. What promise does Hamlet ask Horatio and Marcellus to make?
5. What does Hamlet warn them not to worry about when they see him next?

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Act 2, Scene 1

1. Who is Reynaldo?
2. What does Polonius want Reynaldo to do when he gets to France?
3. What does this reveal about Polonius's character?
4. What has Ophelia upset?
5. What mistake does Polonius fear he may have made?

Act 2, Scene 2

1. Who are Rosencrantz and Guildenstern?
2. Why have the King and Queen invited them to Elsinore and what do they want them to do?
3. What news do Voltimond and Cornelius return with from Norway?
4. How do the King and Queen react to Polonius's hypothesis about what is wrong with Hamlet?
5. What 'plan' does Polonius suggest to test his suspicions?
6. What realization does Polonius come to about Hamlet's madness?
7. How do Rosencrantz and Guildenstern react to Hamlet's questions about why they are there?
8. What group arrives in Elsinore?
9. What private request does Hamlet make of one of the players?
10. What plan does Hamlet reveal to the audience once he is alone on stage?
11. Why does Hamlet feel it is necessary to 'test' Claudius?

Act 3, Scene 1

1. Have Rosencrantz and Guildenstern had any luck discovering what is bothering Hamlet?
2. Closely examine Hamlet's most famous soliloquy on page ____ (lines ____). Summarize the arguments he is contemplating in this speech.
3. a. How does Hamlet respond to Ophelia when she returns some of his gifts?
b. Why does she say she must return them?
4. What lines suggests that Hamlet is aware that his conversations with Ophelia is being overheard?
5. How does Hamlet treat Ophelia in this scene?
6. Is Claudius convinced that Polonius was correct about what ails Hamlet?
7. What does the King want to do about Hamlet at this point? Why?
8. How does Polonius respond to the King's suggestion?

Act 3, Scene 2

1. What is the purpose of drama, according to Hamlet?
2. What does Hamlet ask Horatio to do during the performance of the play?
3. What has Hamlet done with the play and what is the play now titled?
4. How does Claudius respond to the play?
5. Why does Hamlet feel his plan has been successful?
6. Who does Rosencrantz say wants to see Hamlet privately?
7. Why does Hamlet insist that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern play the recorders, even when they insist they do not know how?
8. What does Hamlet reveal to the audience about this meeting?

Act 3, Scene 3

1. What frame of mind is Claudius in as this scene opens?
2. What plan does he have for Hamlet?
3. How have Rosencrantz and Guildenstern shown their loyalty for the King and Queen but disloyalty for Hamlet?
4. What truth does Claudius reveal about his crimes?
5. What was Claudius's motivation for his crimes and why can't he truly repent?
6. At the close of this scene, Hamlet plans to kill Claudius. What persuades him to wait?

Act 3, Scene 4

1. Why does Polonius hide behind a curtain in the Queen's bedchamber when Hamlet comes to see her (as she requested in 3.2)?
2. Why does Polonius yell from behind the curtain?
3. What does Hamlet do to Polonius?
4. Who did he think he was doing it to?
5. What does Hamlet confront his mother with that shocks her?
6. Why does King Hamlet's ghost appear?
7. What promise does Hamlet ask his mother to make?
8. How does the scene end?

Act 4, Scene 1

1. What does Gertrude inform Claudius?
2. Has Gertrude kept her promise to Hamlet?
3. What does Claudius decide he must do to Hamlet?

Act 4, Scene 2

1. How does Hamlet respond to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's request?

Act 4, Scene 3

1. How does Hamlet speak to the King in this scene? List the three major insults he delivers.
2. What reasoning does the King give Hamlet for sending him to England?
3. What plan has Claudius set in motion regarding the fate of Hamlet?

Act 4, Scene 4

1. Who arrives in Denmark in this scene?
2. What is young Fortinbras headed with his men and why?
3. Why is Hamlet's guilt, regarding his delay in avenging his father's murder, exacerbated by what Fortinbras's men are preparing to do?

Act 4, Scene 5

1. What is wrong with Ophelia?
2. Why is Laertes returning from France and what are his plans?
3. What does Laertes accuse Claudius of?
4. What promise does Claudius make Laertes?

Act 4, Scene 7

1. What question does Laertes have for Claudius once he finds out that Hamlet is responsible for his father's death?
2. What reasons does Claudius offer for not dealing with Hamlet for his crime?
3. What plan do Laertes and Claudius devise, when informed of Hamlet's return, to deal with Hamlet?
4. What news does Gertrude bring of Ophelia?

Act 5, Scene 1

1. What religious argument do the gravediggers deal with as they dig Ophelia's grave?
2. How does Hamlet react to the gravediggers jesting as they work?
3. How does Hamlet react once he learns Ophelia has died?

Act 5, Scene 2

1. Interpret the line, "There's a divinity that shapes our ends/ rough-hew them how we will"
2. What further explanation does Hamlet offer Horatio about what happened while he was on his way to England?
3. What wager has the King made on Hamlet's behalf?
4. Describe the death of each of the following and explain what is appropriate or ironic about each death: Gertrude, Laertes, Claudius, Hamlet
5. What one request does Hamlet have for Horatio about what has transpired?
6. How does Horatio respond?
7. What does Hamlet tell Horatio to pass on to Fortinbras?