**Hamlet Discussion Questions, Act 3**

**Act 3, Scene 1**

1) The King and Queen have a discussion concerning Hamlet with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern at the beginning of this scene.

A) Claudius asks why Hamlet “puts on this confusion, / Grating so harshly all his days of quiet / With turbulent and dangerous lunacy?” (lines 3 & 4). What do you think he means?

B) What response do Rosencrantz and Guildenstern give to the king?

C) What does Claudius hear from Polonius, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern that delights him? (lines 17 – 29)

D) What is the dramatic irony in this?

2) When Polonius is instructing Ophelia how to act towards Hamlet so that he and Claudius can spy on her interactions with Hamlet, what does Claudius say something to himself that reveals much to the audience. (lines 56 – 62)

A) What do his lines reveal?
B) What does Claudius mean when he says, “The harlot’s cheek beautied with plast’ring art / Is not more ugly to the thing that helps it / Than is my deed to my most painted word?”

C) How can these lines make the audience have a bit of sympathy for Claudius?

3) Hamlet then speaks his most famous soliloquy (To be or not to be…) in lines 64 – 98. Unlike Hamlet’s first two major soliloquies, his third and most famous speech seems to be governed by reason and not frenzied emotion.

A) What is Hamlet questioning?

B) What does Hamlet mean when he says, “To die, to sleep. / To sleep, perchance to dream—ay, there’s the rub, / For in that sleep of death what dreams may come / When we have shuffled off this mortal coil, / Must give us pause.” (lines 72 – 76).

C) What are some examples of rhetorical devices and figurative language in this soliloquy?
D) Do you think Hamlet is really serious here?

4) Hamlet and Ophelia meet and talk in lines 99 – 162.

A) How does Hamlet respond when Ophelia approaches him, wishing to return his tokens of love? (lines 102 – 130).

B) Hamlet asks if Ophelia is honest in line 113 and then proceeds to discuss beauty and honesty. What is he trying to say to Ophelia? (lines 117 – 129)

C) Hamlet then tells Ophelia “Get thee to a nunnery” (line 131). The explanatory note in your book suggests that the word *nunnery* was sometimes used to refer to a brothel (house of prostitution). How does this alternate meaning impact your understanding of what Hamlet could be saying? How could Hamlet be using both meanings of *nunnery* in this context?

D) In lines 131 – 132 Hamlet urges Ophelia to enter a nunnery instead of “be / a breeder of sinners” (Lines 132 – 140). What are some things that he says to Ophelia regarding how awful men are, including himself?
E) Why might Hamlet ask about Ophelia’s father at this point? (line 141)

F) Hamlet tells Ophelia, “If thou dost marry, I’ll give thee this plague / for thy dowry” (lines 146 – 147). Why might Hamlet say something like this?

G) In line 151 Hamlet tells Ophelia that women make “monsters” out of men. He then clarifies this in lines 154 – 162. What is he trying to say about Ophelia and women in general?

H) Why does Ophelia ask the “heavenly powers [to] restore him?” (line 153).

I) When Hamlet leaves, Ophelia is left on her own to make sense of what Hamlet said to her. What is she thinking right now? (lines 163 – 175)

5) After spying on Hamlet, Claudius and Polonius have a discussion in lines 176 – 203.

A) What does Claudius feel is wrong with Hamlet? (lines 176 - 181).
B) What plan does Claudius hatch to protect himself? (lines 183 – 189)

C) How does Polonius respond? (lines 190 – 201)

**Act 3, Scene 2**

6) Hamlet gives instructions to the players in lines 1 – 15 & 17 - 37 & 40 – 47. What is he advising them of and why?

7) Hamlet then has a conversation with his friend Horatio.

   A) Hamlet praises his friend Horatio for his rational mind and manner and ability to control his emotions in lines 59 – 79. Hamlet explains that he is being honest to Horatio and not just flattering him. Why does Hamlet say that he doesn’t need to flatter Horatio?

   B) What does Hamlet explain to Horatio in lines 80 – 92?
C) How does Horatio respond to Hamlet at the end of his monologue?

8) As others are coming to see the play, Hamlet tells Horatio in line 96 that “I must be idle.” According to your text, the word “idle” in this instance means “out of one’s mind, delirious.” How does Hamlet seem act in lines 99 – 105 to Claudius?

9) In between lines 119 – 279, Hamlet speaks/torments Ophelia with sexual jokes and innuendos. What are some of the things that he is saying to her?

10) As the actors are acting out the play, Claudius asks Hamlet what the play is about. In lines 265 – 267 Hamlet says, “Your majesty and we that have free / souls, it touches us not. Let the galled jade wince; / our withers are unwrung. “

A) What does Hamlet mean by this?

B) How are Hamlet’s lines to Claudius ironic?
11) The actors basically reenact King Hamlet’s death on the stage when the character Lucianus pours poison in the player king’s ear in line 286.
   
   A) What is Claudius’ reaction? (lines 291 – 296).
   
   B) What is Hamlet’s reaction? (lines 297 – 321).

12) In the actual play, the king was killed by his nephew. So, think about Claudius’ reaction. Does it show his guilt over killing the king or does it show something else?

13) Hamlet then converses with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.
   
   A) What information does the pair bring to Hamlet about his mother? (lines 339 – 360)

   B) What is the point of Hamlet’s analogy of the recorders in lines 393 – 402 when he is speaking with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern?
14) Polonius then enters to scene to instruct Hamlet to visit his mother. How does Hamlet’s treatment of Polonius in lines 404 – 418) differ from the way he treats Rosencrantz and Guildenstern?

15) At the end of the scene, Hamlet has another soliloquy in lines 419 – 432.

A. How does Hamlet indicate he is ready to kill the King? (lines 419 – 425)

B. What does he say he will do when he meets with his mother? (lines 425 – 432)

C. Explain his conflicted feelings about his mother.

**Act 3, Scene 3**

16) In lines 1 – 28 Claudius again meets with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

A) What does he order Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to do & why? (lines 1 – 7).

B) Guildenstern replies to the king: “We will ourselves provide / Most holy and religious fear it is / To keep those many, many bodies safe / That live and feed upon your majesty” (lines 8 – 11). What does he mean?
C) Rosencrantz says in lines 12 – 24 that a public figure like the king demands even more protection. What simile does he use to try and explain this? Explain.

17) Polonius then tells the king that Hamlet is going to his mother’s room to speak to her. Polonius is going to spy and then report back to Claudius. After Polonius leaves, Claudius reflects on his situation. (lines 40 – 76)

A) Claudius says, “Oh, my offence is rank. It smells to heaven. / It hath the primal eldest curse upon ’t, / A brother’s murder” (lines 40 – 42). Explain what he is saying and explain the allusion.

B) Claudius tries to pray, but says, “Pray can I not. / Though inclination be as sharp as will, / My stronger guilt defeats my strong intent” (lines 42 – 44). Explain this and what he is expressing in the rest of his soliloquy?

18) Hamlet sneaks up on the king and draws out his sword. The king is alone, so this would be the perfect time to kill him. (Lines 77 – 100).

A. So why doesn't Hamlet kill him at this moment?

B. What does this tell us about Hamlet’s character?
C. When does he decide to kill him?

D. Does Hamlet use this as an excuse to further delay the killing of Claudius or do you think that his conscience will not allow him to commit premeditated murder?

Act 3, Scene 4

19) How does Hamlet verbally attack his mother in lines 11 – 27?

20) Why does Polonius give away that he (or someone) is listening to the conversation?

21) Hamlet believed Claudius was behind the arras (see line 32) when he killed Polonius instead. Why do you think in this pivotal moment he acts quickly, without the hesitation that has otherwise plagued him?

22) After Hamlet stabs Polonius through the curtain, thinking it was Claudius, Gertrude says his action was a “rash and bloody” deed (line 33).

   A) How does Hamlet reply, and what does this tell us? (lines 34 – 37)
B) What does Hamlet say to show that he does not feel any remorse in killing Polonius? (lines 38 – 40).

23) Gertrude then asks Hamlet: “What have I done, that thou dost wag thy tongue / In noise so rude against me?” (lines 47 – 48). How does he respond? (lines 49 – 60).

24) Hamlet then presses contrasting pictures of the late King Hamlet with his brother Claudius in Gertrude’s face. (lines 63 – 98).

A) How does he compare the two men? (lines 63 - 75).

King Hamlet -

Claudius –

B) How does he question his mother beginning on line 75?

C) How does Gertrude react to Hamlet’s verbal attack? (lines 99 – 109)

   A) Why is the Ghost appearing and what does he say to Hamlet?

   B) In lines 121 – 159 Gertrude is unable to see the ghost of her late husband and believes Hamlet to be mad. Why do you think she cannot see the ghost when Horatio and the other guards could in Act 1?

26) In lines 157 – 159, Gertrude tells Hamlet: “This the very coinage of your brain. / This bodiless creation ecstasy / Is very cunning,” telling him that he is going mad.

   A) In lines 161 - 170 how does Hamlet try to prove to his mother that he is not insane?

   B) What three things does Hamlet instruct Gertrude to do and to avoid doing? (lines 170 – 218)

   C) To which of Hamlet’s requests does Gertrude promise?
27) Why do you think that Hamlet confronted his mother in this scene? What was his point in doing this?

28) What are your thoughts about Gertrude from this scene?
   A) What do we learn about her in this scene?

   B) Do you think she guilty of helping Claudius kill King Hamlet?